

# A Study on the Pedagogical Application of Chinese New Year Culture in International Chinese Language Education

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**Abstract:** Culture teaching is an inseparable part of International Chinese Language Education, and it has great significance in international Chinese language teaching. Students can enhance their interest in Chinese language learning and improve their learning effect through understanding the excellent traditional Chinese culture, at the same time, culture teaching can help to disseminate the Chinese culture and promote the development of a multicultural world. Taking the teaching of Chinese New Year culture as an example, we analyze the current teaching materials involving Chinese New Year culture with high popularity and acceptance, put forward effective teaching methods matching the feasibility of teaching Chinese New Year culture, and then present the specific teaching design of Chinese New Year culture, in order to provide references for the teaching of culture in International Chinese Language Education.

**Keywords:** International Chinese Language Education; Chinese New Year culture; Pedagogical application

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## 1. Introduction

Culture is embedded in language, in recent years, cultural teaching has been increasingly emphasized, and the relationship between cultural teaching and language teaching in International Chinese Language Education has also received more and more attention from scholars. Zhao put forward that “cultural teaching is essential in second language teaching, and the content of cultural teaching refers to the teaching of cultural factors that should not and cannot be separated from language teaching itself”<sup>[1]</sup>. Ouyang believed that only by teaching students the fundamentals of the existence of Chinese culture can students truly understand Chinese culture and the Chinese way of thinking<sup>[2]</sup>. In the teaching process of International Chinese Language Education, the appropriate combination of Chinese language teaching and cultural teaching can enable students to have better language learning as well as a deeper understanding of traditional Chinese festival culture. As the most lively and grandest legal festival, Chinese New Year gradually became popular around the world with the improvement of China’s comprehensive national power and international status, which attracted domestic and international populations’ strong interest in Chinese New Year culture.

## **2. Introduction to Chinese New Year culture**

In ancient times, Chinese New Year was called “New Year’s Day,” “First Day,” or “the first day of the year,” i.e. the beginning of the year<sup>[3]</sup>. The Xia Dynasty used the first month of Mengchun as the first month, and the Han Dynasty stipulated the first month of the lunar calendar as the start of the year. The first day of the first month as the first day of the year is New Year’s Day. The *Shuowen Jiezi* (Explaining and Analyzing Characters) states, “Nian is the ripening of grain.” As the year is divided into four seasons, sow in spring, grow in summer, harvest in fall, and store in winter, although the grain growth cycle is only a few months (less than a year), the meaning of “New Year’s Day” still implies that people are looking forward to and celebrating the grain harvest. Since then, it has been using the summer calendar and lunar calendar. In 1912, Yat-sen Sun announced that China adopted the world common calendar, also known as the solar calendar, and decided January 1, 1912 was the first year of the new calendar for the Republic of China. January 1 on the solar calendar is called New Year (*xinnian*), but not New Year’s Day (*yuandan*). In 1949, after the founding of the People’s Republic of China, January 1 on the solar calendar was called New Year’s Day, and the first day of the first month of the lunar calendar was officially changed to Chinese New Year<sup>[4]</sup>.

## **3. Significance of Chinese New Year culture in the teaching of International Chinese Language Education**

### **3.1. Enhancing the fun of teaching to stimulate students’ learning enthusiasm**

Learners tend to maintain a positive attitude of openness and acceptance towards the culture of the country where the target language is spoken. Therefore, giving full play to the charm of the cultural factors themselves in international Chinese teaching classrooms is conducive to establishing a connection between students and the culture as well as the target language and stimulating the enthusiasm for learning by providing students with cultural knowledge with rich connotations, enhancing the interest of teaching and conforming to learners’ motivation. A research study by Huang *et al.* on international students’ cognition, attitude, and evaluation of Chinese culture shows that the most interesting topics for international students are festival culture, food culture, and traditional Chinese talents, and among the festival cultures, the one with the highest level of students’ cognition is Chinese New Year (98.2%)<sup>[5]</sup>. Therefore, combining the great significance of Chinese New Year in Chinese traditional festivals, it is necessary to integrate cultural teaching with the theme of Chinese New Year into the international Chinese teaching classroom.

### **3.2. Alleviating cultural shock and improving cultural identity**

The differences between cultures lead to barriers between subjects from different cultural backgrounds and between subjects and the target language culture. Such barriers may lead to the discomfort of the communicating subjects, and the outward manifestation of such barriers is “culture shock.” According to Enid, culture shock is the discomfort, helplessness, and overwhelmed feelings that occur when people living in a certain cultural environment try to understand or adapt to a different cultural group due to different cultural values, beliefs, and habits<sup>[6]</sup>. Culture teaching increases the opportunities for learners to come into contact with the target language culture and participate in relevant activities, and provides learners with the possibility of communicating in the target language culture, which can, to a certain extent, help learners alleviate the “culture shock” in the target language country. Therefore, the application of Chinese New Year culture in International Chinese Language Education is of great significance in transferring learners’ anxiety, enhancing learners’ sense of identification with Chinese culture, and improving their understanding of Chinese society as a whole.

### **3.3. Enriching international Chinese language teaching methods and enhancing language teaching efficiency**

The presentation of culture after historical precipitation is often characterized by stability, inheritance, artistry, and diversity, and the diversity of cultural expressions provides more choices of teaching forms when cultural teaching is integrated into international Chinese language teaching. Nowadays, international Chinese language teaching is still based on the traditional form of teaching, the teaching of language ontology knowledge, but choosing the appropriate teaching form for cultural teaching gives students a higher sense of participation and can maintain a higher learning efficiency. Taking Chinese New Year culture as an example, there are various forms of Chinese New Year culture as teaching activities, such as hands-on lessons of making dumplings, writing and pasting Chinese New Year couplets, paper-cutting, Chinese New Year customary performances, cultural evenings, and so on. After experiencing the activities, learners are able to gain a deeper understanding of both the Chinese New Year culture and the Chinese language.

### **3.4. Showcasing China's image and promoting the dissemination and development of China's outstanding traditional culture**

From the interest survey mentioned in the previous section, it is also found that international students in China only have a superficial understanding of the core spiritual meaning of traditional Chinese festivals. For instance, they only know that Mid-Autumn Festival is associated with eating mooncakes and enjoying the moon and the Dragon Boat Festival is associated with eating *zongzi* and rowing dragon boats, and they are not aware of the spiritual connotations of these festivals. In international Chinese language teaching, taking the cultural connotation of Chinese New Year as a foothold, in addition to the name of the festival, the time of the event, or the introduction of food and drink, in-depth spiritual connotation along with the development of China's modern society can show learners a comprehensive and three-dimensional image of China and the idea of the simple and harmonious social values. Through these, learners can understand the concept of China's development in a more detailed and comprehensive way and experience the charm of Chinese traditional culture, which enhances China's national image and promotes the dissemination and development of China's excellent traditional culture.

## **4. Feasibility of Chinese New Year culture in the teaching of International Chinese Language Education**

### **4.1. Culture teaching is inseparable from language teaching**

According to Sapir-Whorf, "Language is the carrier of culture and the reflection of culture, language and culture are inseparable, and each language carries specific cultural connotations" <sup>[7]</sup>. Therefore, language teaching for international students will inevitably involve the teaching of culture, learners will go through the surface of the language symbols to experience the cultural knowledge contained behind the symbols; and when teaching specialized cultural knowledge, the teaching process is also realized through the language lecture, learners can only teach cultural knowledge normally when they have the corresponding language knowledge reserves. The application of Chinese New Year culture in international Chinese language teaching not only ensures the normal realization of language teaching but also enables learners to have a deeper understanding of the customs, connotations, and significance of Chinese New Year, which is a national festival.

### **4.2. Information technology disseminates Chinese New Year culture**

Wen and Liu believed that empowering the high-quality development of education with information technology

has been a general trend <sup>[8]</sup>. With the rapid development of information technology, education informatization has become a strategic choice for education reform in countries around the world with its efficiency and wisdom. Festival culture is an important part of Chinese traditional culture, and Chinese New Year, as the grandest of Chinese traditional festivals, has great application value in cultural teaching. For example, as an essential event full of Chinese New Year culture, the Chinese New Year Gala, while meeting the appreciation needs of the Chinese people and the global Chinese, also has the attribute of international dissemination as a global public cultural product. From 2019 to 2021, the multilingual Chinese New Year cultural special program meets the viewing needs of 44 language groups <sup>[9]</sup>. Under the conditions of modern information technology, teachers can use multimedia and other technical means to show the Chinese New Year Gala to students, so that they can better understand and master the cultural knowledge; students can also learn about the Chinese New Year Gala intuitively and meticulously through various platforms and channels on the Internet; and at the same time, it can also enhance the communication and interaction between teachers and students through the network teaching platform, providing more possibilities for the teaching of Chinese New Year culture.

### **4.3. Strong operationalization facilitates teaching and learning**

Textbooks are the main materials for students to acquire systematic knowledge in school, and Chinese textbooks involve a lot of traditional cultural knowledge, which plays an important role in spreading Chinese culture, and cannot be separated from textbooks for both language teaching and cultural teaching. After analyzing the cultural elements of traditional festivals in 79 commonly used international Chinese language education textbooks, it is found that there are 20 Chinese New Year cultural elements, which appear 62 times, and the more frequent elements are spring couplets, firecrackers, and dumplings <sup>[10]</sup>. In the teaching practice of Chinese New Year culture, it is easier to prepare materials such as pasting spring couplets and making dumplings, and create a festive atmosphere in the classroom. In the festive atmosphere, students tend to be more tolerant of and interested in new things, and they are often more willing to participate in the practice. For cultural elements that cannot be displayed in the classroom like firecrackers, teachers can utilize multimedia technology to visually display and explain them to the students. Teachers can use multimedia technology including pictures, videos, and other ways for visualization and explanation to increase students' understanding of the cultural elements of Chinese New Year.

### **4.4. Increasing global recognition makes it accessible to students**

As Chinese New Year is becoming more internationalized, it is now designated as a public holiday in several countries, such as Indonesia and the Philippines. The states of New York and Maryland in the United States have also designated Chinese New Year as a statewide holiday <sup>[11]</sup>. At present, nearly 20 countries in the world have designated Chinese New Year as a legal holiday, and Chinese New Year has been widely promoted all over the world. In addition, Chinese New Year is also a significant holiday for Chinese nationals in some Southeast Asian countries. It can be seen that most international students are not unfamiliar with the Chinese New Year culture, and as Huang *et al.* have shown, the Chinese New Year has a high level of awareness among students <sup>[5]</sup>. Therefore, teaching Chinese New Year culture in international Chinese language not only satisfies the learners' love and curiosity for Chinese culture, but also ensures the realization of the goals of international Chinese language teaching.

## **5. Conclusion**

Under the trend of globalization, exchanges among countries have become increasingly close, and cultural

mutual understanding among countries has become more and more frequent. Therefore, while promoting international Chinese language education, we should focus more on the inheritance and dissemination of the excellent Chinese traditional culture. In the process of international Chinese teaching practice, we should emphasize and mutually support both cultural teaching and language teaching and attract students' interests with rich cultural forms, so that more international students can recognize and understand Chinese culture while learning Chinese. As a significant part of traditional Chinese festival culture, Chinese New Year culture has a wide influence on the world. Taking Chinese New Year culture as a starting point, we can analyze the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures while improving students' language skills, strengthening students' identification with Chinese culture, reducing cultural conflicts and misunderstandings, and promoting the innovation and prosperity of cultures around the world.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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