

# Application of the Understanding by Design Framework in Chinese Clothing Culture Education

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**Abstract:** This study examines the application of the Understanding by Design (UbD) approach to enhance students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor learning domains, as well as their intercultural communication competence, in the Introduction to Chinese Culture course. UbD, a curriculum design framework emphasizing deep understanding over rote memorization, employs a "backward design" process to help students achieve a profound comprehension of Chinese culture and its modern implications. Through this approach, students also develop critical intercultural communication skills. The study offers helpful strategies for integrating English language teaching with Chinese cultural education, providing practical insights for curriculum development that bridges linguistic and cultural learning.

**Keywords:** Understanding by Design approach; Three domains of learning; Intercultural communication competence; Chinese cultural education; Backward design

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## 1. Introduction

Culture reflects a nation's history, values, and identity, connecting generations while fostering unity and resilience. Preserving and understanding cultural heritage sustains national pride and equips individuals with intercultural competence, essential for thriving in a globalized society. Chinese clothing culture exemplifies the integration of material culture and ritual propriety, with concepts like "sitting properly with correct attire" highlighting moral values and social etiquette. Hanfu (traditional Chinese attire), rooted in Han culture's rituals, transcends practicality, symbolizing millennia of material and spiritual heritage. Its influence on neighboring traditions, such as Korea's Hanbok, underscores the dynamic cultural exchange within East Asia.

However, university-level cultural education often suffers from limited depth and fragmented understanding<sup>[1]</sup>. By applying the Understanding by Design (UbD) framework, this study reimagines course planning to address these challenges. The Chinese Clothing unit demonstrates how the UbD approach fosters meaningful engagement, cultural understanding, and intercultural competence, empowering students to connect

deeply with their own culture while appreciating others.

## **2. The Understanding by Design approach**

The UbD framework, developed by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, emphasizes deep understanding and meaningful learning over rote memorization<sup>[2,3]</sup>. By focusing on desired outcomes, UbD aims to equip students with enduring understandings and transferable skills that extend beyond the classroom. This approach guides students to grasp core concepts and apply their knowledge in diverse contexts, fostering authentic learning experiences.

When applying UbD to the Introduction to Chinese Culture course, teachers begin by interpreting the objectives of each cultural unit. They identify overarching “big ideas,” align them with ideological and political education, and design course units with these end goals in mind. This backward design process unfolds in three key stages<sup>[2-5]</sup>:

### **(1) Stage 1: Identifying desired results**

The first stage defines the learning outcomes for each unit. Teachers set “Big Ideas” and “Essential Questions” to create a cohesive framework that connects the course content. For example, in teaching traditional Chinese clothing, big ideas might explore how clothing reflects cultural identity and societal values. Essential questions like “How does traditional Chinese clothing reflect historical and social values?” guide students toward a deeper understanding of cultural heritage.

### **(2) Stage 2: Determining acceptable assessment evidence**

In this stage, teachers design assessments to measure students’ understanding and their ability to apply knowledge in real-world contexts. Assessment methods include quizzes, essays, presentations, and discussions. For example, students might compare traditional Chinese clothing with modern attire, analyzing cultural implications and presenting their findings. These assessments help refine teaching strategies and ensure that students’ intercultural communication skills are continually developed.

### **(3) Stage 3: Planning learning experiences and instruction**

Based on the objectives and assessments, teachers design engaging, interactive activities to deepen students’ exploration of the big ideas. Activities might include analyzing historical artifacts, group discussions on the evolution of Chinese clothing, or role-playing intercultural scenarios. These activities foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and self-directed learning, preparing students to navigate a multicultural world with enhanced cultural awareness and competence.

## **3. Three domains of learning and intercultural communication competence**

### **3.1. Three domains of learning**

Effective course design integrates cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains of learning to cultivate a holistic understanding<sup>[6]</sup>. In the UbD framework, when applied to Chinese clothing culture and interwoven with Hanbok, this approach not only deepens students’ knowledge but also enhances their intercultural communication competence by fostering comparative analysis and cultural appreciation. The development of intercultural communication competence—defined as the ability to effectively and appropriately interact with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds—relies on the integration of three domains of learning: cognitive (knowledge), psychomotor (skills), and affective (attitudes).

### **3.1.1. Cognitive domain**

The cognitive domain involves the development of mental skills and knowledge acquisition. In this course, students analyze the historical evolution, symbolic meanings, and cultural values of Hanfu and Hanbok. For instance, they explore how Confucian principles influenced clothing in both cultures, emphasizing modesty and hierarchical order <sup>[7]</sup>. While uncovering shared values, they also examine differences, such as Hanfu's layered robes and Hanbok's high-waisted skirts, reflecting unique geographical and societal influences. Students study garments like Hanfu worn by scholars and ceremonial Hanbok worn by royalty to understand their roles as cultural symbols <sup>[7,8]</sup>. These comparisons foster critical thinking and a nuanced appreciation of cultural narratives.

### **3.1.2. Psychomotor domain**

The psychomotor domain focuses on physical skills and practical applications. Students engage in hands-on activities such as presentations, discussions, and collaborative projects. Through visual analyses, they compare Hanfu's straight-lined designs with Hanbok's structural elements like the chima (skirt) and jeogori (jacket) <sup>[8]</sup>. Workshops on identifying patterns, colors, and materials help students connect theoretical knowledge to tactile experiences. These activities enhance their understanding of craftsmanship and allow them to explore how traditional clothing shapes posture, movement, and social interactions in different cultural contexts.

### **3.1.3. Affective domain**

The affective domain addresses emotions, attitudes, and values. Students reflect on the cultural significance of Hanfu and Hanbok, exploring how these garments evoke national pride and symbolize cultural revival in modern China and Korea. Discussions and reflective writing encourage students to consider how traditional clothing fosters identity and belonging. This process nurtures respect for cultural heritage and empathy for other traditions, promoting mutual understanding and global awareness.

By aligning the three domains of learning with an intercultural perspective, the course integrates moral education and intercultural understanding. Confucian ideals like harmony and mutual respect are woven into the curriculum, fostering values that transcend cultures <sup>[7]</sup>. Through the UbD approach, students gain an appreciation for their own culture while developing openness to others. Exploring Hanfu and Hanbok enriches the content, equipping students with the skills and attitudes necessary for meaningful cross-cultural interactions, making the learning experience transformative and impactful.

## **3.2. Chinese culture, Korean Hanbok, and intercultural communication competence**

The Introduction to Chinese Culture course, a cornerstone of Chinese university curricula, aims to deepen students' understanding of the nation's rich history and cultural heritage. It covers material culture, spiritual traditions, and social institutions, emphasizing Confucian values such as social harmony, moral character, and respect for hierarchy. To enrich this understanding, the course includes a comparative exploration of Hanfu and Hanbok. Both reflect Confucian ideals, yet their designs and cultural contexts highlight how shared values take unique forms in different societies. Hanfu's flowing silhouettes and intricate embroidery emphasize grace and symbolism, while Hanbok's vibrant hues and structural simplicity convey modesty and practicality <sup>[7,8]</sup>. By studying these garments, students gain a deeper appreciation of how traditional attire embodies cultural identity and values.

This comparative study broadens students' global perspectives and fosters respect for cultural diversity. By examining historical connections, such as the influence of Tang and Song Dynasties on Hanbok, students

develop an understanding of the cultural exchanges between China and Korea. This not only strengthens their cultural identity and pride in their heritage but also enhances their intercultural communication skills.

In a globalized world, the ability to articulate cultural concepts is essential. The course bridges cultural understanding and language proficiency by teaching students to discuss Chinese culture—and its intersections with others—in English. Through this, students learn to explain how Hanfu and Hanbok represent Confucian ideals while highlighting their unique features. By integrating Confucian values, cultural education, and English language skills, the course fosters students' cultural awareness and confidence, preparing them to navigate and contribute meaningfully to a multicultural world while effectively representing Chinese culture.

#### **4. Application of the UbD framework in the course design of Chinese clothing**

Chinese clothing, with its rich and dynamic history, reflects the nation's cultural and social evolution. From the Zhou dynasty's garment regulations based on social strata to the fusion of Han and Manchu styles during later periods, Chinese clothing has continually adapted to societal changes<sup>[9]</sup>. For college students, understanding the historical development and cultural significance of traditional Chinese attire is essential, as it provides insights into China's material culture, spiritual values, and aesthetic traditions. By employing the UbD framework in teaching Chinese clothing, the course fosters not only cultural knowledge but also skills in global awareness, critical thinking, and intercultural communication.

##### **Stage 1: Desired results**

The desired outcomes focus on helping students connect traditional Chinese attire to broader cultural and historical contexts. Three key ideas are emphasized: (1) Historical and social evolution: Students explore how traditional attire reflects social hierarchy and Confucian values. (2) Symbolism and ethical values: The embedded meanings of colors, patterns, and materials in Chinese clothing are examined to understand their ethical and cultural significance. (3) Cultural awareness and respect for diversity: Students recognize how clothing shapes cultural identity and fosters respect for global cultural diversity.

Essential questions guide the inquiry process, encouraging students to reflect deeply. Examples include: How do traditional Chinese clothing styles reflect the values and social structures of their time? What are the similarities and differences between Chinese Hanfu and Korean Hanbok, and what cultural distinctions do they reveal?

##### **Stage 2: Assessment evidence**

Assessment strategies are designed to evaluate students' understanding of core concepts and intercultural communication competence. These include: (1) Class discussions: Students articulate insights into the evolution of Chinese clothing styles, such as Hanfu, Qipao, and Tang suits, and compare them with Korean Hanbok to explore design, symbolism, and cultural context. (2) Group discussions: Students engage with essential questions, analyzing how clothing serves as a marker of identity and heritage across cultures. (3) Comparative report: A written reflection on the differences between Hanfu and Hanbok demonstrates students' understanding of their historical and cultural significance and the intercultural connections between Chinese and Korean traditions.

##### **Stage 3: Learning plan and activities**

Teaching and learning activities are structured to guide students through the exploration of Chinese clothing history and cultural significance: (1) Interactive exploration: Students analyze images and descriptions of traditional Chinese attire, focusing on the symbolic meanings of colors, patterns, and design elements in

garments like Hanfu and Qipao. (2) Comparative analysis: The teacher presents images and videos of Hanfu and Hanbok, allowing students to explore their historical origins, design features, and cultural meanings. Students identify distinct and shared features, fostering critical thinking and intercultural awareness.

By integrating these stages, the course fosters intercultural communication competence, enabling students to understand and articulate the deeper cultural meanings of traditional Chinese clothing. Through comparative analysis of Hanfu and Hanbok, students not only deepen their understanding of Chinese culture but also cultivate an appreciation for the shared heritage and distinctions between neighboring cultures.

## 5. Conclusion

As society evolves, educators must adapt to create dynamic, engaging learning environments. The Introduction to Chinese Culture course, designed with the UbD framework, deepens students' understanding of Chinese history and philosophy while enhancing their intercultural competence. By integrating cognitive, psychomotor, and affective learning domains, the course fosters critical thinking and cultural appreciation. For instance, the Chinese Clothing unit explores the values reflected in Hanfu and its comparison with Hanbok, emphasizing both shared traditions and unique identities. This student-centered, inquiry-based approach equips learners with the skills to navigate cultural divides and serve as communicators of Chinese culture in a globalized world. Future research could apply the UbD framework to other cultural topics, incorporating real-world scenarios to further strengthen students' ability to convey cultural concepts effectively across contexts.

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## Disclosure statement

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