

Culturality in Foreign Language Education Taking Foreign Language Teaching in Chinese Colleges and Universities as an Example

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ABSTRACT

In today's world, when various cultures coexist, foreign language education is not just about language teaching, but about bringing culture into view. The value of culture teaching in foreign language education is increasingly recognized by the international community of foreign language teachers. However, it remains to be studied how to improve and effectively implement cultural teaching, which is of great significance in university foreign language education. This paper analyzes this issue on the example of foreign language teaching in Chinese colleges and universities.

Keywords: Foreign language education, Cultural teaching, Communicative competence.

1. INTRODUCTION

Foreign language education is a part of pedagogy, and the study of foreign language teaching maximizes the development of language learners' linguistic competence through the teaching and learning of foreign languages. With the increasing frequency of cooperation between countries, new requirements have been put forward for the linguistic competence of foreign language learners, as well as for the purpose, content, and method of foreign language learning. Foreign language as a language not only requires students to master grammar but also requires intercultural communication as a culture. Therefore, in foreign language teaching, only relying on knowledge-based education and language skills training is not enough to meet the needs of communication, nor is it conducive to the cultivation of students' humanistic qualities and moral sentiments. In recent years, the introduction of culture in foreign language education has attracted more and more attention, and many scholars and researchers have studied it.

2. DEFINITION OF CULTURE

"Culture" is a word familiar to most people, and it has a wide range of meanings. Since the early nineteenth century, culture has been a subject of academic interest, and different scholars have studied it from different perspectives and interpreted it in different ways. Although these interpretations have enriched and expanded the connotation and extension of culture and gradually brought culture into people's view, they have also made scholars' understanding of culture more diverse and their differences more and more obvious. Culture contains a wide range of contents, and it is quite difficult to truly and completely understand the meaning of culture. Scholars from different countries have different understandings of culture; Chinese scholar Zheng Jinzhou has accumulated more than 310 definitions of culture, and American scholar Clyde believes that there are more than 300 definitions of culture. Different understandings of culture have long been the center of debate. Some scholars cannot help but conclude that "it is futile to attempt or claim to define the scope of the concept of culture." As a result, it is difficult to arrive at a specific definition that is widely accepted.

Culture takes many forms, and the definitions given by each discipline have their specialization, making it impossible to achieve a single definition that covers all forms and areas of culture. Therefore, this paper will only study the culture of language teaching and learning. At present, culture is divided into two major categories in foreign language teaching. One category is intellectual culture, which is essentially similar to the category of civilization and refers to the achievements of society in the fields of literature, art, geography, history, philosophy, architecture, politics, education, religion, science and technology. The other category is communicative culture, which is related to the thoughts, ideas, customs, and behavioral patterns of the members of society. Specifically, communicative culture encompasses not only the food, clothing, and shelter of the members of society, but also their attitudes towards their family and friends, the specific ways in which they behave in a given situation, and their expressions of daily greetings, praise, thanks, apologies, agreement, disagreement and so on.

About culture in foreign language teaching, factors such as beliefs, morals, emotions, values, lifestyles, and folk traditions should be integrated into real life. Introducing multiculturalism in university foreign language and culture teaching and guiding students to analyze key cultural variables are conducive to cultivating students' compatibility with different cultures, thus broadening their cultural horizons and improving their cultural literacy. At the same time, analyzing the differences between the culture of one's own country and the cultures of other countries helps to analyze and understand one's own culture, which is conducive to constructing a correct cultural outlook.

3. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Language and culture cannot be separated from each other. Language is the carrier of culture and an inseparable part of culture, and no language is separate from culture. "Language reflects culture, language transmits culture, language transmits culture, and language constrains culture; culture influences and constrains language, and culture is the external rule of language use."

Any language represents the historical process, cultural practices, and customs of that nation, as well as its national psychology, religious beliefs, cultural thinking, and emotional attitudes. To teach a language is to teach a culture, and to learn a

language is to learn a culture. At the same time, learning a language through culture is a very pleasant and effective way to learn a language. Only a culturally-integrated language can be vibrant and the whole language learning process can be fun.

4. CULTURE ASPECTS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

In foreign language teaching, the concept of culturality is linked to knowledge and reflects the teacher's aim of "educating" people in the cultural sphere. The cultural aspect of foreign language teaching refers to the attention paid to cultural variables such as values, morals, emotions, and lifestyles, as well as the realization of their educational role in foreign language teaching. According to Professor Yuan Guiren, "The emergence of universities is to inherit culture, spread culture and create culture, and through the inheritance, spreading and creation of culture, to promote the socialization, individualization, and civilization of the educated people, to shape the sound and perfect human beings. The process of education and teaching in universities is essentially a purposeful and planned cultural process. The so-called teaching, management, service, and environment are, in the final analysis, cultural education."

To some extent, all materials used in foreign language teaching contain a certain cultural component, and it can be said that all of them reflect cultural characteristics from different perspectives. Such cultural features are inherent in the materials, but to have the desired positive impact on students and to internalize the external culture in their minds, it is necessary to organize and refine the cultural factors in the materials and to highlight their beneficial aspects. This is a prerequisite for the pedagogical activities of teachers and students.

In recent decades, the foreign language teaching community in China has incorporated cultural components into its teaching and intensified its research on cultural differences and cultural theories. In the syllabus of foreign language majors in Chinese colleges and universities, the requirement to study the culture of the country whose language is being studied was put forward very early. Teachers must follow the syllabus in their teaching and cannot make choices based on personal preferences. *The Syllabus* states that "a foreign language is an important tool for learning

cultural and scientific knowledge, for acquiring information about the world and for international communication, and that the purpose of foreign language teaching is to develop the ability to use a foreign language for communicative purposes, both orally and in writing.” Experts agree that communicative competence in a foreign language should consist of four components: mastery of grammar; possession of four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing); choice of discourse appropriate to the context; and knowledge of socio-cultural rules of use.

Research in cultural linguistics has shown that language stores all the social life experiences of a country and reflects all the cultural characteristics of an ethnicity. Language and language application cannot exist in isolation from culture. Foreign language teaching not only provides knowledge and training in the “four skills” but also places such learning and training in the context of cultural teaching so that students can ultimately improve their linguistic competence. Language teaching for language use inevitably involves the teaching of language and culture. Cultural factors are not proportional to the complexity of language forms. Simple language forms do not mean that pragmatic and cultural factors can be ignored in their use, such as “How do you do?”, “Hello!”, etc. The real challenge for students is not how to standardize their pronunciation or spelling, but how to use the language effectively in actual communication. The most basic communicative activities may involve cultural factors, so cultural teaching should also be included in the most basic daily teaching. If foreign language teachers integrate pragmatic and cultural factors throughout the teaching process and place language forms in the context of socio-pragmatic functions, they can “bring language knowledge to life” and gradually improve students’ pragmatic competence.

Krum (1977) has stated that effective foreign language classroom teaching should include more contexts for students to practice the language content they have mastered. Teachers can instruct students on how to use the language material to improve their pragmatic competence to fulfill the pragmatic and cultural requirements of communicative language teaching. In structuralist teaching, linguistic form, semantics, and function are separated, with the main emphasis on linguistic form and internal structure. Students taught using this approach may excel at assimilating specialized linguistic forms and structures, but they may lack the linguistic communicative competence to learn a

foreign language effectively. The purpose of foreign language teaching should be to develop language application skills, which cannot be separated from knowledge and understanding of the culture of the country in which the language is being taught.

5. FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND CULTURE

Foreign language education includes language teaching and cultural teaching, and foreign language education is an important part of cultural education. Since the beginning of the 21st century, cultural exchanges and integration around the world have become more common, and the cultural consciousness of countries has become stronger and stronger. As an important way of cultural exchange and integration, the cultural purpose of foreign language education has become more and more prominent. At present, countries should attach great importance to the cultural purpose of foreign language teaching. Foreign language education should not only promote national culture but also export it to the world; disseminate the world’s outstanding culture, actively absorb the outstanding civilization achievements of various countries, focus on the ideological borrowing of language, consciously strengthen resistance to cultural imperialism and effectively safeguard the country’s cultural security.

5.1 The Necessity for Culture in Foreign Language Education

Many foreign language learners and teachers focus only on the cultural factors and content that affects reading and communicating in a foreign language and do not fully recognize the role of foreign language teaching in developing the learners’ humanistic and comprehensive qualities, and thus the potential of foreign language teaching has not been fully developed. Nowadays, many foreign language learners and users are currently experiencing an identity crisis, especially foreign language students and teachers. This is mainly because the goal orientation of foreign language teaching emphasizes the instrumental aspect at the expense of the humanistic aspect. In addition, the overall growth of young people’s foreign language skills has led to a blurring of the cultural identity of foreign language students.

In today’s world, when one’s own culture is neglected, learners should be encouraged to

compare and dialog with the cultures of different countries confidently while promoting their own ideas and cultures. Actively apply cultural knowledge and practice in one's own country, and promote the ideals and spirit of one's own culture in other languages. One of the most important tasks of foreign language education in China is to gradually transfer cultural exchanges between China and other countries from the stage of "cultural input" to that of "cultural interaction" and eventually to the stage of "cultural output". The mission of China's foreign language education sector should be to use foreign languages to make the voice of Chinese culture heard, to express the values and aspirations of Chinese culture, to minimize the misinterpretation of Chinese culture by other countries, and to enhance China's overall external image.

The foreign language program in Chinese colleges and universities is not only a foreign language-related subject, but also a comprehensive reflection of the cultures of other countries. Foreign language teaching in colleges and universities should not only let students learn a foreign language but also cultivate their communicative habits and ways of thinking. Therefore, in foreign language teaching in colleges and universities, the teaching of language knowledge should be synchronized with the teaching of cultural knowledge and integrate the two. Integrating cultural education into university foreign language teaching can effectively integrate language skills and cultural knowledge, which is an effective means to cultivate high-level talents and improve the quality of foreign language teaching, and an important step.

The following three aspects illustrate the necessity of the new situation for Chinese cultural education in Chinese foreign language teaching.

First of all, it helps university foreign language programs cultivate high-quality students with intercultural communicative competence. At present, China's education authorities hold an encouraging attitude towards the teaching of Chinese culture in college and university foreign language majors. Colleges and universities have gradually introduced Chinese culture courses into the teaching of foreign language majors and recommended Chinese culture reference materials to foreign language majors. In this way, foreign language majors can obtain relevant materials on Chinese culture in their disciplinary studies, deepen their understanding of Chinese culture, and

strengthen their awareness of the flexible use of language based on mastering linguistic disciplines. In the cultivation of foreign language majors, attention should not only be paid to the cultivation of students' professional language application abilities such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, and so on, but also to the cultivation of students' intercultural communication consciousness. It is crucial to strengthen the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence of foreign language majors in daily teaching. In addition to courses on the cultures of other countries, courses on Chinese culture should also be offered. In the process of learning foreign languages, students should be infiltrated with the culture of their mother tongue. In the teaching of foreign language majors in colleges and universities, some students can successfully communicate in foreign languages about other countries' culture, such as the origin and traditions of Christmas. However, it is difficult for them to express the relevant contents of Chinese culture in foreign languages. The reason for this is that foreign language majors lack knowledge of Chinese culture, and they are unable to grasp the essence of Chinese culture when the degree of cultural popularization is not high. It can be seen that only by introducing content related to Chinese culture in foreign language teaching can students' traditional cultural education be popularized and their understanding of the unique culture of the Chinese nation be strengthened, and in this way cultivate students' intercultural communication consciousness and improve their intercultural communicative competence.

Secondly, it helps foreign language majors to have a correct understanding of the culture of China and other countries. Chinese culture is rich and diverse and contains quite a wide range of content. Excellent traditional culture represents the wisdom of ancient people and helps the development of Chinese society and civilization. Chinese excellent traditional culture is inseparable from the continuous progress of the Chinese nation. Some gems of ancient wisdom that have been passed down for thousands of years can still be used in current culture. For example, *The Great Learning* discusses the Confucian idea of cultivating one's moral character, aligning one's family, ruling the country, and calming the world, which was written during the Qin and Han Dynasties. The thinking of Confucianism and the culture of Confucianism have exerted far-reaching influence on future generations. In the long history of the development

of the Chinese nation, the Chinese people have gradually formed a social ethos inspired by Confucianism, which can be regarded as the national spirit. The Chinese national spirit can be summarized into two parts: the spirit of striving for excellence and the camaraderie of solidarity and mutual help. Implementing Chinese culture education in foreign language teaching in colleges and universities helps to cultivate students' personality and is important in promoting students to establish an optimistic mindset. In addition, incorporating Chinese culture education into foreign language teaching also helps to increase students' sense of identification with traditional Chinese culture and enhance national self-confidence. Traditional culture is an important part of Chinese culture, and foreign language majors stimulate patriotic feelings while learning traditional culture. In the process of Sino-foreign communication, foreign languages can serve as a bridge between China and foreign countries. As a part of culture, Chinese excellent traditional culture is characterized by compatibility and inclusiveness, which can have a significant impact on other aspects. Besides Confucianism, there are also Taoist and Mohist cultures. Taoist culture advocates the law of nature and dialectics; Mohist culture advocates right and wrong and criticizes the theory of descent and fatalism of previous generations. As an important part of China's outstanding traditional culture, the above ideas and cultures can help students see the world from multiple perspectives and expose them to opposing viewpoints to cultivate their dialectical thinking. Learning about China's outstanding traditional culture is crucial for foreign language majors because it will help them set the right goals in life and motivate them to pursue their beliefs. More importantly, strengthening foreign language majors' study of China's excellent traditional culture will help them inherit China's excellent national culture and increase their sense of national pride.

Finally, it contributes to the popularization of patriotic education and the maintenance of national cultural security. The term "soft power" emerged in the 1990s. As a country develops rapidly in the digital age, soft power becomes increasingly important to it. Culture is one of the components of soft power. Culture is an important indicator of a country's soft power and plays a vital role in its development. The soft power of Chinese culture is one of the reasons why China is among the countries of the world and has great influence.

Carrying out Chinese culture education in foreign language teaching in colleges and universities can accelerate the spread of traditional Chinese culture, significantly enhance students' national self-esteem and self-confidence, and is crucial to maintaining China's national cultural security. As a spiritual force, culture can influence people's thinking. To increase the global influence of Chinese culture, one must first fully recognize one's own culture in the process of cultural exchange between China and foreign countries.

Based on this, China's colleges and universities must actively respond to the "culture going out" strategy proposed by the Party and the State, integrate Chinese culture into foreign language teaching, expand Chinese-foreign cultural exchanges, and carry out foreign cultural trade, to better safeguard China's cultural security.

5.2 The Importance of Cultural Heritage in Foreign Language Education

Traditional Chinese culture is the crystallization of wisdom in the form of different thoughts, cultures, and concepts formed in the history of many Chinese nationalities, and it has a long history, profound influence, strong inclusiveness, and distinctive national characteristics. Since traditional Chinese culture is rich in ethnicity, it cannot be ignored or abandoned in foreign language learning and education. In the current practice of foreign language teaching in China, the connection and interaction between traditional culture and foreign language education are often neglected.

The following two aspects exemplify the relationship between traditional cultural education and foreign language teaching.

Firstly, traditional culture education is the basis for establishing intercultural dialogues. The main purpose of foreign language teaching is to train learners with intercultural communicative competence, which requires learners to master their mother tongue culture. "The concept of 'intercultural communication' can be defined in this way: oral communication between communicators with different cultural backgrounds using the same language (mother tongue or target language) in a specific communicative situation." Intercultural communication based on conceptual expression has two aspects: first, the communicators must be from different cultural backgrounds; second, the communicators must use the same language for barrier-free communication. Therefore, mastering

the culture of the mother tongue is the cornerstone and the most important guarantee of efficient intercultural communication. Intercultural communication is considered to be based on the comprehensive knowledge and correct understanding of the mother tongue culture. Chinese traditional culture is extensive and profound, and discussing intercultural communication requires a comprehensive understanding of it. If one's own culture is not known or half-understood, one cannot solve the problem of intercultural communication.

Secondly, traditional cultural education is an important prerequisite for strengthening the export of Chinese language and culture. With China's rapid economic and social development and the improvement of its comprehensive national strength and international prestige, the international "fad of Chinese language learning" has reached its peak. At the same time, Chinese language education in China has entered a new stage of development, which is no longer limited to Chinese language education for international students but has begun the strategy of "going out" to promote Chinese language education in the international community and strengthen the status and discourse power of Chinese language in the international community. Therefore, understanding traditional culture has become a prerequisite for the development of the Chinese language, and going global with the Chinese language is one of the main ways to export Chinese culture. Only when the Chinese language is widely studied, researched, and applied in the international community can Chinese culture and concepts be publicized to the outside world through the Chinese language, so that the international community can have a more comprehensive understanding of traditional Chinese culture and Chinese humanistic values, and then understand and accept China's social values and cultural concepts, to communicate with the international community in a better way. Lin Yutang pointed out that "a nation that exports its culture is a more developed nation, while a nation that accepts a foreign culture is always in turmoil due to changes in its environment." In this process, the knowledge and understanding of traditional Chinese culture becomes crucial, because only with a full understanding of traditional Chinese culture can it be promoted and exported. Therefore, traditional culture education has become a strategic requirement for strengthening the international promotion of Chinese language and cultural export.

The importance of learning traditional Chinese culture for foreign language majors is reflected in the following three aspects.

First, language majors need to learn. Chinese traditional culture is essential for foreign language majors. At present, foreign language majors strive to cultivate compound talents with good humanistic and scientific literacy and international perspective. Students must have solid basic bilingual skills, as well as good language acquisition, language organization, and language application skills. Language and culture are inseparable. American scholar Claire Kramsch pointed out in her book *Language and Culture* that culture expresses and symbolizes cultural reality. This requires foreign language majors to have a good ability to express themselves in their mother tongue and spread their own culture, as well as good communication and presentation skills, and an understanding of the development of China's history, economy, culture, science, and technology.

Secondly, it is important to tell a good Chinese story. As the main battlefield for training international talents, foreign language majors in colleges and universities should not only improve students' language skills but also strengthen the education of traditional Chinese culture, which has become an important task in higher education nowadays.

Thirdly, it is important for the cultivation of internationalization vision and bilingual application ability. Foreign language students must pay more attention to the study and accumulation of excellent traditional Chinese culture, and bring Chinese culture to the world in the context of exchanges and mutual understanding among world civilizations and close ties between countries. When Chinese culture is imported and exported through a foreign language, Chinese students find it easier to grasp and accept Chinese culture, as well as to understand and master the foreign language. Therefore, foreign language education in colleges and universities should train students to skillfully convey Chinese culture and literary knowledge in foreign languages, enhance their intercultural communicative competence, and lay a solid foundation for correctly telling the Chinese story.

5.3 The Contemporary Value of Chinese Culture in Foreign Language Education

Foreign language education should actively promote Chinese culture to the world, especially the promotion of China's great traditional culture. People are more interested in culture than ever before, and improving China's cultural attractiveness will help increase the global voice of Chinese culture. Foreign language education in China has traditionally focused on "introducing the world to China" rather than "introducing China to the world". Although the Internet Age has made international connections easier and more frequent, there is still an imbalance between the input and output of Chinese cultural exchanges. China has many outstanding cultural works, the key is to let the world see and hear them. This gives foreign language education a new mission in modern society, which is to cultivate students' awareness of actively promoting Chinese culture, to innovate high-quality language expressions related to culture, and to disseminate them in the best way possible.

"Introducing China to the world" has become an important task in foreign language teaching, which has created a new standard for foreign language teaching and learning in China. The goal of learning a foreign language is to reach out to the world so that more people around the world can understand the profoundness of China's 5,000 years of culture. Therefore, Chinese culture has taken on a new contemporary value in foreign language education.

6. CONCLUSION

Language skills cannot be separated from cultural knowledge. If the teaching of any foreign language loses the inheritance of its mother tongue culture, it is a foreign language education that has lost its "soul". In the development of foreign language subjects today, the inheritance of one's own national culture is particularly prominent and important. Foreign language learning must strengthen the study and accumulation of mother tongue culture, and at the same time, to be familiar with and understand other cultures. Cultivating foreign language talents with a sense of family and country, solid language skills and relevant professional knowledge is the basis for the survival of the foreign language discipline.

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