

The Dilemmas and Solutions of Teaching Chinese Culture as a Foreign Language from the Perspective of Constructivism Theory—A Systematic Review Based on Literature of the Past Decade

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Abstract: Over the past decade, the field of teaching Chinese as a second language has continued to develop, showing a trend towards younger learners and increasing professionalization. Chinese teaching in different countries no longer only focuses on traditional language mode, but integrates cultural element into language teaching, thus cultivating the communicative competence and international perspective of international Chinese language talents. However, existing studies mostly focus on macroscopic discussions from intercultural perspectives, and systematic analysis of micro-level issues such as the content system and teaching methods of cultural teaching remains insufficient. Therefore, this paper takes Constructivism as a framework and conducts research around three core issues: first, the research progress and mainstream practical paradigms of cultural teaching in the past decade; second, the core difficulties of current cultural teaching at the levels of research perspectives, content systems, and teaching methods; third, how to combine teaching practice to construct an optimized path of the “language-culture-intercultural communication” trinity. Therefore, based on the perspective of Constructivism, this paper combines the author’s own teaching practice through reviewing relevant literature, summarizes the research progress of cultural teaching, and provides operable innovative solutions to solve the existing dilemmas, so as to promote the high-quality development of international Chinese language education.

Keywords: International Chinese language education; Constructivism; Cultural teaching; Trinity

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1. Introduction

In the teaching process, an increasing number of Chinese learners and users have shifted their learning focus to the comprehensive training goal of “language + culture + intercultural communicative competence”. Meanwhile, intercultural communication dilemmas in real-language contexts have become increasingly prominent: although learners have mastered certain Chinese vocabulary and grammar, they still produce pragmatic errors and encounter cultural conflicts due to a lack of understanding of the cultural rules and social norms behind the Chinese language.

In the early 1980s, the field of teaching Chinese as a foreign language began to research cultural instruction in

teaching Chinese as a foreign language. Xiong and Zhu proposed that the process of learning and using a language is also a process of understanding society and culture ^[1]. Such learning helps eliminate gaps in interactions and achieve genuine mutual understanding. They focused on the sociocultural barriers encountered by foreigners learning Chinese, and put forward the goal of cultivating intercultural communicative competence for Chinese as a foreign language learning. Zhang clarified the importance of cultural teaching, pointing out that there is no language that exists independent of its specific cultural background, yet the cultural background knowledge of a language is extremely extensive ^[2]. He divided the content of cultural teaching into knowledge culture and communicative culture, and also noted the problem that communicative culture lacks attention in Chinese language teaching.

In view of this, this study is based on official public materials including core journals and reports from the Ministry of Education's Center for Language Cooperation and Exchange over the past decade. By sorting out the theoretical foundations and practical paradigms of cultural teaching, it deepens the research on the application of Constructivism in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language. In addition, this study combines classroom observation cases from typical countries and regions with the author's personal teaching internship experience to construct an optimization path, so as to target and solve the prominent problems of current cultural teaching at the levels of content system and teaching methods.

2. Literature review on cultural teaching in teaching Chinese as a foreign language

2.1. Relevant theoretical foundations

2.1.1. Research on constructivism

Constructivism emerged in the 1980s as a further development of learning theory. "Construction" refers to the process in which learners form and adjust their own experience structure through repeated, two-way interaction between old and new knowledge and experience. And Constructivist Learning Theory regards learning as a processing process of interaction between an individual's original experience and the social environment, and it was clearly identified as the theoretical foundation for deepening the reform of international Chinese language teaching a long time ago ^[3,4]. Liu took the "Introduction to China" course offered by a university to international students as an example, selected the section on "food culture", and emphasized the importance of Constructivist Learning Theory for intercultural teaching in international Chinese education ^[5].

2.1.2. Research on culture teaching in teaching Chinese as a foreign language

Based on a review of literature related to cultural teaching in international Chinese language education over the past decade, the research progress of cultural teaching in international Chinese language education can be analyzed from the aspects of teaching content, teaching methods and research perspectives.

2.2. Research perspectives mostly focus on cross-cultural theoretical frameworks and academic paradigms

Li and Ding pointed out that cultural teaching in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL) should be oriented by learners' current needs and the dissemination of national image ^[6]. Only in this way can we better achieve the purpose and effect of cultural teaching and dissemination, and help foreigners and Chinese language learners understand a diverse, inclusive, open, developing and changing China in a comprehensive, objective, real and vivid way. Zhu conducted research from a cross-cultural perspective, noted that there are many contradictions and conflicts in TCFL, and proposed a number of solutions ^[7]. For example, teachers can adopt teaching methods such as experiential teaching, staged teaching and comparative teaching to improve the efficiency of TCFL. Jiang takes archival archaeology and multi-source mutual verification as the core method, and through the daily scenes repeatedly appeared by marginal individuals, it reflects the power and ethical boundaries of contemporary TCFL cultural teaching from a side perspective, providing first-hand historical materials and methodological examples for cultural teaching ^[8].

2.2.1. Teaching content mostly relies on textbook compilation, selection and presentation of cultural content

Luan proposed that when selecting cultural content, teachers must grasp the relationship between Chinese culture and foreign cultures, integrate them, and reflect on the essence of Chinese culture before applying it to Chinese teaching^[9]. Besides, writing is also one of the important forms to promote Chinese cultural learning. Shen emphasized that TCFL is an important part of promoting Chinese to the world and expanding China's influence, among which the demand for cultural teaching is becoming increasingly urgent^[10]. She discussed issues such as content selection and cultural conflicts in cultural teaching, and put forward countermeasures for content organization and presentation. Liu et al. pointed out that TCFL textbooks should be close to daily life, have native-like interpretations, diverse forms and more detailed classification, while maintaining outstanding professionalism and knowledge, hence effectively guiding Chinese learners to eliminate cognitive barriers and better understand and learn Chinese culture^[11].

2.2.2. Teaching methods mostly focus on teaching strategies and technical applications

Kennedy mentioned that in traditional Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) classroom, "cultural teaching" only focuses on theoretical research and has not verified its operability by combining with practical teaching strategies^[12]. He also designed and piloted a set of operable four-dimensional teaching method based on cross-cultural theory, namely "ICLT teaching method", whose teaching structure is comparison-reflection-connection-interaction, which can provide specific and effective teaching methods for CFL teachers. Li and Sun proposed that cultural teaching should be narrativized, and local cultural resources should be organized and told as cultural stories. Narrativization can transform relevant cultural knowledge from cognition to understanding, and from understanding to expression, which makes it easier to resonate with people and spread^[13]. Wang et al. emphasized that large intelligent language models represented by ChatGPT will put forward higher requirements for the digital infrastructure of international Chinese language education. Therefore, how to provide more convenient services for participants of various identities such as administrators, teachers and students is the key to promoting the high-quality development of international Chinese language education^[14].

Overall, in terms of research perspective dimension, most scholars lack comparative integration from the perspective of Constructivism; in terms of teaching content dimension, researches do not focus on how to carry out dynamic updating and localization transformation according to the cultural changes of the country, ethnicity or community where Chinese language learners belong and their interest shifts; in terms of teaching method dimension, most teaching method researches fail to deeply explore the differences in method adaptability among learner groups of different countries, ages, language proficiency levels and learning motivations, and there is a problem of lack of method effectiveness, which requires long-term empirical data research. Thus, It can be seen that the existing literature all have the deficiency of "de-construction" or "weak construction", and there is an urgent need to explore new research perspectives and ideas under the framework of Constructivism.

3. Optimization paths based on constructivism

Based on the sorting out and analysis in Chapter 2, this chapter puts forward specific optimization paths in accordance with the three core principles of Constructivism: "situational cognition-co-construction of meaning-active reflection", compares the three dimensions, and combines the author's own teaching experience.

3.1. Developing constructivism-oriented mixed research perspectives

The Constructivism-oriented mixed research perspective pays more attention to the dynamic internal process of learners' learning. Wang pointed out that constructive learning is a type of self-regulated learning, in which learners need to judge their own learning objectives, progress, degree of knowledge understanding and which learning-friendly strategies to adopt through activities such as self-monitoring, self-testing and self-examination, so as to continuously improve their own metacognitive level^[15]. The constructivism-oriented mixed perspective can not only identify the external influencing

factors of foreign Chinese learners (such as country of origin, age, native language proficiency, etc.), but also get rid of the limitation of single quantitative statistics or qualitative description. Researchers can track the long-term learning process of Chinese learners, design indicators, build models, integrate quantitative data, combine qualitative materials, and conduct in - depth analysis of learners' meaning construction process in real situations. For example, teachers can systematically collect quantitative evidence such as students' test scores in daily classroom teaching situations, and at the same time combine qualitative materials such as classroom observations and learning logs to understand students' dynamic cognitive process and cultural understanding.

3.2. Enriching the student-centered Chinese culture teaching system

Zhang and Chen mentioned that traditional culture teaching for Chinese as a foreign language divides teaching content into three levels: cultural factors embedded in language, basic national conditions and cultural background knowledge, and specialized cultural knowledge^[16]. However, some traditional culture teaching materials lack scientificity and relevance to the current era, and some cultural content cannot meet the actual communication needs of Chinese language learners. Therefore, teachers should develop student-centered classroom teaching. Huang emphasized that compared with traditional knowledge-based culture teaching, process-oriented culture teaching under the constructivist theoretical model has three characteristics: in terms of teaching method, it shifts from focusing on teachers' instruction to focusing on students' learning, and encourages students to actively explore various cultural phenomena; in terms of teaching content, it shifts from focusing only on the target culture to attaching equal importance to the target culture and learners' native culture; in terms of teaching objectives, it shifts from only focusing on cultural knowledge to valuing the co-development process of cognition, affection and behavior^[17]. This indicates that the current era requires our foreign-oriented culture teaching to be student-centered and oriented by the needs of the times and the shaping of national image, so as to better promote the real time updating and localization transformation of cultural content. For example, when teaching a learner whose Chinese proficiency has just reached HSK Level 2, the author found that the learner showed strong difficulty aversion and avoidance towards some cultural content. Therefore, through understanding the learner's professional background and learning interests, the author adjusted the teaching content and guided the learner to compare it with the specific situation of his own country. This adjustment makes the learning content more interesting and practical. Hence, the core of teaching content is to help learners become "active constructors of cultural meaning and participants in intercultural dialogue".

3.3. Constructing a teaching feedback mechanism centered on process evaluation

The core of teaching methods is instructional design. Xiu pointed out that teachers should not only reasonably coordinate instructional design from the aspects of student situation analysis, teaching objective design, teaching content selection, teaching form organization, teaching evaluation method, and the development of students' competence, but also facilitate the smooth implementation and sound operation of instructional design through an effective and relatively flexible management environment, diverse teaching resources, rich campus culture and a strong learning atmosphere^[18]. Therefore, after implementing teaching methods, teachers should establish a process-oriented evaluation and feedback mechanism to conduct comprehensive evaluations of students as much as possible. Through multi-agent collaboration, combination of multiple methods and integration of multiple indicators, it can fully reflect students' learning situation. For example, teachers can use learning portfolios to record students' progress and reflections in Chinese language and culture learning; use virtual simulation systems to design cultural tasks, which can evaluate students' language use and cultural interpretation abilities. In addition, teachers can also use intelligent learning platforms to track the progress and path of students' cultural learning and provide personalized feedback prompts.

4. Conclusion

Through the above analysis, the study finds that cultural teaching has still faced multiple core dilemmas in the past decade.

To address this issue, the trinity path of “language–culture–intercultural communication” constructed in this paper, based on the principles of scientificity, immediacy and professionalism, can provide new approaches for effectively solving the existing problems. In the future, Chinese as a foreign language cultural teaching can further focus on specific scenarios such as young learners and online teaching, strengthen the universality verification of innovative paths and teaching methods, continuously improve the intercultural communication competence of Chinese learners, so as to better promote the in-depth integration of cultural teaching and international communication of the Chinese language.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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