

# **The Study on Cultural Introduction in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language: Taking the SCI Project of F University as an Example**

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## **Abstract**

Language and culture are interdependent and related closely. Language is not only the carrier of culture, but also an important part of culture. Thus, teaching Chinese as a foreign language is not only a process of imparting language, but also the cultural exchange between China and foreign countries. Taking the summer Chinese SCI ( Summer Chinese Language Immersion ) project of F University as an example, this paper discusses the contents, principles and methods of cultural introduction.

**Keywords:** Summer Chinese SCI project; Cultural introduction; Principles; Methods

## **1. Introduction**

Language is the carrier of culture, and learning a language is also learning the culture it carries. At present, language teaching is not only about teaching language knowledge, but also focusing on cultivating learners' cross-cultural awareness and communicative competence. In terms of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, teachers should not only understand the linguistic and cultural characteristics of Chinese, but also introduce culture by appropriate means.

The School of International Cultural Exchange of F University is a professional department of Chinese language and culture teaching for international students, which attracts more than 3000 international students from more than 100 countries every year, known as the "mini United Nations". In order to meet the needs of international students to learn Chinese and understand Chinese society and cultural environment, the "Summer Chinese Language Immersion" program (hereinafter referred to as SCI program) is set up in July and August every year. The program includes three parts: Chinese course, culture course and cultural immersion. The first part enables students to improve their listening and speaking ability within one to two months; the latter two are helpful for foreign students to experience profound Chinese culture and increase their understanding of Chinese society.

## **2. The Importance of Culture Introduction in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language**

With the development of China, more and more overseas students come to China to study. Generally speaking, although second language learners hold various motivations, they are always active and curious when they first start to learn a new language. However, through the practice of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, scholars have found that many learners give up learning Chinese within six months. Yu Lingyun (2018) pointed out that this was because teachers and textbooks of Chinese as a foreign language ignored the needs of foreign



students. He believed that cultural needs led to the desire for verbal communication, and the improvement of language ability in turn met the cultural needs of foreign students and enabled their sense of cultural identity.

The scholars on foreign language teaching have long noticed the important role of cultural factors in language acquisition, but they paid less attention to cultural factors in the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language. As of September 28, 2020, we have searched CNKI with the key words of "cultural teaching" and found a total of 20201 relevant research articles. With the words of "Chinese as a foreign language, culture introduction" as the key words, the results were only 29, with the proportion of cultural articles about 1:700. It can be seen that the cultural introduction in teaching Chinese as a foreign language needs further research.

The essence of teaching Chinese as a foreign language is language teaching, so language knowledge itself is very important, but it is more important to cultivate the second language learners' interpersonal communication ability. If the teachers can pay attention to the cultural factors contained in teaching and introduce culture into teaching in an effective way, it will contribute to the organic integration of Chinese culture and linguistic knowledge, so as to cultivate foreign students' cultural awareness and sensitivity, and then cultivate a group of international friends who love Chinese society and culture. On the contrary, only focusing on the teaching of Chinese language knowledge is not conducive to the transition of primary, middle and advanced Chinese learning in the future, nor is it helpful to the establishment of a sense of cultural identity.

### **3. The Content of Culture Introduction in The Teaching of Chinese as a Foreign Language**

Culture is reflected in all aspects of life. Our language and behavior, clothing, food, housing and transportation all reflect the unique cultural characteristics of our own nation. Taylor (1871) explained the connotation of "culture" in his "Primitive Culture". He believed that culture, in terms of its broad national significance, was an internal complex whole including knowledge, belief, art, morality, law, custom and the ability and habit acquired by anyone as a member of society. With the development of society and the improvement of many humanities, the concept of "culture" has been increasingly enriched. In teaching Chinese as a foreign language, due to the different cultural backgrounds of learners, "culture" and "cultural factors" mainly refer to the Chinese cultural background knowledge that learners need to master when using Chinese for proper communication.

Zhang Zhanyi (1984) divided culture into "informative culture" and "communicative culture" - the former refers to the non-verbal cultural background knowledge which has no direct impact on verbal communication, such as the Chinese civilization inherited for thousands of years; the latter refers to the reflection of a nation's psychological state, values, lifestyle, mode of thinking, moral standards, customs, habits and aesthetic taste implied in the language system. These two concepts have aroused strong repercussions in the academic circles. In language teaching, this kind of distinction is necessary, as the former is the core of cross-cultural communication and the first concern, which directly affects the function of language communication; the latter is secondary and will not have a direct impact on communication.

"Cultural Introduction" in teaching Chinese as a foreign language mainly refers to the introduction of "communicative culture". That is to say, the teachers not only teach the basic knowledge of Chinese language (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and Chinese characters, etc.), but also the cultural knowledge involved in verbal communication. For example, although the "information" about Chinese history and geography can also help communication in the long run, it is not as practical as the knowledge related to Chinese people's daily life such as "mobile payment" and "sharing economy", and it is not as good as the "communication culture" such as "treat dinner", "greetings" and "social etiquette" that can directly improve students' communicative competence.



Therefore, the teachers should divide the teaching content: informative culture is the content of the special course of culture teaching and communicative culture is the content of teaching Chinese as a foreign language.

With the textbooks used in the Chinese course of SCI program in the School of International Cultural Exchange of F University as an example, we have analyzed the content of cultural introduction in teaching. The textbook used in the SCI program of F University is "Road to Success". The goal of the editor in terms of culture is: "a complete cultural chain of "cultural phenomenon - cultural connotation - cultural comprehension "running through the whole set of textbooks. For example, "Introduction", "Beginning" and "Upper Elementary" levels use limited materials of primary Chinese, showing cultural points as much as possible, so that learners can naturally feel and understand Chinese culture while learning the language. " (Qiu Jun, 2008:2)

We take "Road to Success: Upper Elementary I" as the starting point for analysis. This textbook is suitable for the second language learners whose Chinese level is in the stage of "primary to middle". Its cultural introduction includes five aspects: interpersonal communication, daily life, society and humanities, values, and symbolic culture. Among them, interpersonal communication includes addressing and apology; daily life includes food and clothing, festival customs, etiquette, etc.; society and humanities involves geography, history, religion, myth, traditional art, etc.; values concern poetry, idioms, philosophy, etc.; symbolic culture includes color, number, totem and other things with special symbolic significance. According to Zhang Zhanyi's classification, the first two can be classified as communicative culture and the latter three as informative culture. Table 1 shows the number and distribution of cultural points in the textbook.

Table 1 Cultural Points in the "Road to Success: Upper Elementary I"

Cultural Points Distribution	Informative Culture		Communicative Culture		
	Interpersonal Communication	Daily Life	Society and Humanities	Values	Symbolic Culture
Text	5	9	10	6	2
Additional Words	0	9	8	1	3
Notes on Language Points	2	6	5	0	2
Exercise	1	15	17	8	6
In Total	8	39	40	15	13

According to the Table 1, the cultural introduction in this textbook mainly focuses on the introduction of daily life and social humanities, with the least involvement of interpersonal communication; on the other hand, the distribution of cultural points is unbalanced - there are more cultural points covered in the text and exercises, and fewer in the additional words and notes.

As for the imbalance of cultural introduction, we believe that it is determined by the stages. Since the textbook is aimed at the second language learners who are transiting from the primary stage to the middle level, the editor has formulated a higher level of teaching content considering that foreign students have learned a lot about "interpersonal communication" in the primary stage. It can be seen that there are different requirements for cultural introduction in the primary, middle and advanced stages of teaching Chinese as a foreign language. The primary stage mainly introduces the culture of Chinese daily life, that is, culture is integrated into language teaching; students in the middle stage need rich communicative culture, involving a wide range of communication occasions; on the basis of middle stage, more knowledge and culture can be introduced into the advanced stage to promote the students' deeper understanding of China.



To sum up, the textbook has both advantages and disadvantages in the aspect of cultural introduction. Its advantage is that it has many cultural points covering a wide range, and the content introduced is close to daily communication. As for the deficiencies, the cultural points are not systematic enough, and the cultural factors involved mainly serve to explain linguistic knowledge; the means of introduction need to be enriched, such as the combination of words and pictures.

Combined with the stages, advantages and disadvantages of the introduced content of the textbook, we put forward some principles of cultural introduction in the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language.

## **4. The Principle of Culture Introduction in The Teaching of Chinese as a Foreign Language**

Culture introduction is one of the most concerned topics in language teaching. However, due to the broadness of "culture", there is no uniform standard on how to introduce culture. On the basis of the study of "Road to Success: Upper Elementary I", we believe that cultural introduction should follow the following principles:

### **4.1 Periodicity**

The introduction of culture should be from easy to difficult, according to the law of learners' acquisition. For example, the content of cultural introduction in the primary teaching of Chinese as a foreign language should be mainly general cultural knowledge, so that overseas students can have a preliminary understanding of Chinese life. It is not in line with the law of language teaching if we teach foreign students middle-level language and cultural knowledge at primary stage.

### **4.2 Communication**

Teachers of Chinese as a foreign language should introduce the language and cultural knowledge which is easy to cause students' misunderstanding and even noneffective communication. Taking the explanation of Chinese cultural words as an example, teachers should focus on explaining the unique cultural semantics of the words which are different from the equivalent words of other nationalities.

### **4.3 Moderation**

Teachers of Chinese as a foreign language should adjust the introduced contents according to their teaching tasks. China has 5000 years of history and culture accumulation, so "textbooks and teachers should introduce the most common and typical cultural knowledge to solve the cultural barriers in current language teaching" (Zhao Aiguo, Jiang Yaming, 2003:82).

### **4.4 Accuracy**

The teaching of Chinese as a foreign language should ensure the accuracy of the teaching content. Teachers should have a correct understanding of the content of the textbook, as well as the language and culture to be taught. For uncertain content, teachers should actively search for sufficient and detailed basis and evidence, and should not take the teaching content for granted just because Chinese is their native language.

## **5. The Means of Culture Introduction in The Teaching of Chinese as a Foreign Language**

In addition to the certain principles above, we should also use the appropriate means to introduce culture. Based on the SCI program of F University, we suggest the following methods:

### **5.1 Random integration**

Random integration means introducing culture while teaching language knowledge. For example, cultural background can be taught in vocabulary teaching. Etiquette and customs can be introduced in explaining words



such as "betrothal gift" and "escorting bride", the culture of food and clothing can be introduced in explaining words such as "Longjing" and "Qipao"; literature and art in explaining "Peking Opera" and "Tang poetry", and Chinese architectural culture in explaining "Hutong" and "garden".

Teachers can compare Chinese and foreign languages in random integration. Take "greetings" as an example. The European and American countries often greet with "hello" and "good morning", while the Chinese prefer "have you eaten?" "Where are you going?". What's more, the Chinese people often chat about salary, age and children. Such kind of greetings can easily lead to misunderstanding of European and American students, thinking that the Chinese people have the habit of inquiring about other people's privacy. Therefore, the teachers of Chinese as a foreign language should explain clearly to the students that the Chinese people's greetings record the common topics of their interpersonal communication for a long time - clothing, food, housing and transportation, which reflects their daily concern, and is not intended to inquire privacy.

### **5.2 Thematic discussion methods**

In addition to the Chinese teaching, the SCI program of F University also includes the cultural courses and cultural immersion.

The form of culture course is special lecture, which focuses on explaining Chinese culture. It is a history and culture course in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. The teachers from the School of International Cultural Exchange of F University determine the theme of each lecture according to the interests and hobbies of foreign students and hot topics on the Internet, such as calligraphy, Chinese painting, Taijiquan, etc. After the cultural lectures, the teachers will lead the foreign students to experience in person.

As the supplement and support of the lecture, the form of cultural immersion is cultural practice, including hands-on activities such as making dumplings and visiting local cultural attractions. Taking the "making dumplings" in the food culture experience of SCI program as an example, the teachers will prepare the raw materials in advance, first explain the dumpling culture in class, then make dumplings by hand for students to observe, and finally let students truly experience the fun of making and eating dumplings. For another example, the School of International Cultural Exchange of F University will organize overseas students to visit Huangpu River and some other "requisite scenic spots" such as Street of Fame and Culture and Zhujiajiao Town in Shanghai, so that the students can feel the breadth and profundity of the Chinese culture.

These practices and special courses are good cultural teaching methods, which can help students form a more systematic understanding of the Chinese culture.

### **5.3 Teaching through playing**

With the increasing influence of China, Chinese films, TV programs and songs are more and more popular with the young people abroad, which can also be used as cultural points to be introduced, such as holding Chinese song competitions and poetry reading competitions by combining popular culture and Chinese classical culture. If the international students start to actively compete "who can sing more Chinese pop songs, who can recite Chinese poetry more affectionately, and who has seen more Chinese movies", they are able to learn through playing.

In the closing ceremony of the SCI program, there are such "Chinese talent" competitions. Some foreign students sing pop songs such as "Little Apple", and others perform Kung Fu or recite ancient poems. Having won the praise of teachers and students, the learners can continuously obtain the sense of satisfaction and their learning motivation can be further stimulated.

## **6. Conclusion**

Taking the SCI program of School of International Cultural Exchange of F University as an example, this paper studies the related issues of culture introduction in the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language. First of all, starting from the Chinese course in the project, this paper analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of



cultural introduction in the "Road to Success: Upper Elementary I", and sums up the principles of cultural introduction; secondly, focusing on the cultural courses and cultural immersion in SCI program, this paper explores the means of cultural introduction.

Through the Chinese courses, cultural courses and cultural immersion, the School of International Cultural Exchange of F University has effectively helped foreign students to deepen the understanding of the Chinese culture. Therefore, cultural introduction and language learning complement each other. As an important part of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, cultural introduction can improve the efficiency and quality of Chinese teaching.

The above are only conclusions drawn from the research of SCI program. "Teachers of Chinese as a foreign language should make great efforts to create a culture introduction and culture teaching mode complementary to language teaching, and use them flexibly according to the specific situations of students" (Sun Xinxin, 1997:86). We hope that the academic community will deepen the research on cultural introduction, so that the education of international students will rise from "going into China" in spatial position to "close to China" psychologically and emotionally, cultivate more international students who "know China" and "are friendly to China", so as to promote friendly exchanges between China and the people of the world.

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