

Original Paper

The Possible Way of Developing Cultural Education in Confucius Institutes Based on the Questionnaire Method

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Abstract

In recent years, more and more scholars have noticed the important role of cultural teaching in international Chinese teaching. The development of culture teaching, its relationship with language teaching, and the training of native teachers are the focus and difficulty of current research. This study explored the views of 51 young Confucius Institute volunteers from different continents on the current situation of cultural teaching, analyzed the content of cultural teaching, students' feedback on cultural teaching, and teachers' and students' views on localized teachers, and put forward the corresponding feasible strategies to provide some reference for the construction and development of Confucius Institutes.

Keywords

Confucius Institute, Cultural teaching, Investigation and research, Localization

1. Introduction

International Chinese education is an interdisciplinary subject that was born in response to needs. In the eight years of the construction of the Belt and Road, people have increasingly realized the importance of international Chinese education to achieve “unimpeded culture” in the “five links” in one day. As the main platform for promoting Chinese culture overseas, Confucius Institutes have been accused of being politically charged and attempting cultural invasion in countries that are not pro-China by their operating model and long-standing principles. Lu said: “If we teach Chinese ideas and so on, it will make people suspicious. If the Confucius Institutes are to continue to function well, they need to change direction. The problem of combining teaching Chinese culture and teaching Chinese is central to current academic research.

2. Literature Review

For many years, Chinese culture “going out” has been a hot topic in domestic research circles. There is more research on the theoretical model, the crux of the problem, and strategy suggestions, but few research results for reference in the empirical research effect investigation. At the level of empirical research, some researchers have discussed the correlation between Confucius Institutes and Chinese culture going global and discussed its development model and problems. In addition to theoretical research, existing researches include cognitive investigations on cultural symbols such as Chinese tea and the Great Wall. However, due to the limited research samples of researchers, a broader range of empirical investigations and tests are needed to determine whether the survey results have universal significance.

At the same time, these surveys still focus on the universality of Chinese culture, and there is little investigation into the adaptability of Chinese culture with regional characteristics to different countries. The Heilongjiang University of Chinese Medicine and Harbin Normal University, which are major provinces of wild Chinese medicinal materials, jointly organized the London Confucius Institute of Traditional Chinese Medicine with London South Bank University in 2007, focusing on their advantages and the national conditions of the UK. According to statistics, as of 2017, there will be more than 2,000 TCM shops in the UK, more than the rest of Europe combined. Therefore, setting up a Confucius Institute for TCM in the UK is fitting. Such a distinctive Confucius Institute has been awarded “Global Advanced Confucius Institute” for five consecutive years. This is not only the recognition of its teaching quality, but also the affirmation of the development of regional and national characteristics of the Confucius Institute. Is the success of the London Confucius Institute worth promoting?

Some Confucius Institutes only use Chinese culture such as martial arts as a publicity stunt. Through field visits to four Confucius institutes and one Confucius classroom in Kenya, Zhang Jichao (2022) found that the setting of martial arts classes was unstable and remained in the technical dissemination, the culture behind martial arts was not widely publicized, and the overall image of Chinese culture was difficult to be concertized. Lu Jianming (2022) believes that Chinese talent can be properly taught in kindergartens and primary and middle schools to arouse children’s interest in learning Chinese, but it should also be moderate. The key to balancing culture teaching and Chinese teaching is how to make students return to the teaching ontology learning, effectively accept Chinese culture, and build a cognitive framework of Chinese culture.

3. Basic Information about Chinese Teachers

From 1 March 2023 to 1 April 2023, the author surveyed Chinese volunteer teachers who had been involved in cultural teaching at Confucius Institutes through the Questionnaire Star system. In this survey, a total of 51 questionnaires were sent out and 51 were collected, with a collection rate of 100%. After late manual control to eliminate inconsistent invalid questionnaires, 50 valid questionnaires were

obtained, with a validity rate of 98.04%.

As of 23 July 2020, 541 Confucius Institutes and 1,170 Confucius Classrooms have been established in 162 countries (regions). Among them, 39 countries (regions) in Asia have 135 Confucius Institutes; 46 countries in Africa, 61 Confucius Institutes; 43 European countries (regions), and 187 Confucius Institutes; there are 138 Confucius Institutes in 27 countries in America. There are 20 Confucius Institutes in seven Oceania countries. Based on the number of Confucius Institutes in each country and the actual number of Chinese volunteer teachers in Confucius Institutes, the final sample is as follows:

Table 1. Sample Location

Continents	Asia	Europe	America	Oceania	Africa
Number of people	28	13	6	2	1

The samples were mainly distributed in Asia and Europe, specifically Thailand, Indonesia, South Korea, Germany, and the UK. These five countries also have the largest number of Confucius Institutes. The number of Confucius Institutes is positively correlated with the expectation value of external cultural communication, and the Confucius Institutes with high convergence and relatively backward construction are eliminated to a certain extent, which provides a scientific reference for understanding the current status of Confucius Institutes and finding a new development path suitable for Confucius Institutes. Meanwhile, 93.5 percent of the respondents were women and 6.5 percent were men.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1 The Frequency of Cultural Teaching is High, but the Convergence Is Strong

In this survey, the frequency of cultural teaching activities in most Confucius Institutes is two to three times a month, accounting for 66.67% of the total number of the survey, once a month for 16.67%, once every two to three days for 8.33%, and once half a year for 8.33%. This shows that most Confucius Institutes currently attach great importance to cultural teaching and hold cultural teaching activities almost every month, but some Confucius institutes only hold cultural teaching activities once every six months, which may be related to the scale and the purpose of the institute.

In further investigation, When asked about the activities held by the Confucius Institute, It seems that the current activities held by Confucius Institutes are mainly simple and hands-on. As shown in the table below, the cultural activities of paper-cutting and calligraphy, and painting are the most frequently held activities of Confucius Institutes in this survey. As can be seen from the table, the current convergence of Confucius Institutes around the world is relatively high. If cultural teaching activities are to be held, hands-on activities with fewer procedures and easy to use will be held. The author also interviewed other volunteers and learned that the Confucius Institute where they worked also held tea

art and poetry recitation activities, but the frequency was relatively low. Some activities with regional characteristics are ignored, or limited by venues and personnel. If you want to display the tea art, you need to prepare a large number of tea sets and tea leaves, which are not available in the countries where Confucius Institutes are located, so you need to send them from China, which consumes more time and money. Moreover, only a few Chinese volunteers can learn tea art, and few can find tea art and local culture in a short time, and the effect of a demonstration may not be as good as expected. Therefore, tea art has not become the main activity of cultural teaching held by Confucius Institutes. Similarly, poetry recitation activities have higher requirements for students. To present as good effects as possible, students need to understand the culture behind the poems from the bottom of their hearts, which puts forward relatively high requirements for students' Chinese level. Moreover, if the current textbook has little to do with the culture to be understood, it is easy to ignore one and lose the other. Therefore, teachers will not ask students to recite poems for no reason.

Table 2. Current Types of Cultural Teaching Held by Confucius Institutes

Calligraphy and painting	66.67%
Martial arts	33.33%
Paper-cutting and other handwork	75%
Peking Opera	33.33%
Make Chinese food	41.67%
other	25%

According to the feedback of Confucius Institute students to teachers after the activities, 50% of them think that the cultural teaching activities are rich, 33.33% think that the activities are rich and varied, and 16.67% think that the activities are simple. In terms of the content of cultural teaching, 66.67% of students think that the activities are profound, and 33.33% think that the activities are superficial. 58.33% of students often express their intention to hold cultural teaching activities, and 33.33% of students express similar intentions but few. These three data also reflect from the side that although the current cultural teaching activities have a relatively high frequency, the content, and form will be relatively simple. "For Chinese learners, understanding Beijing Opera, Tang Dynasty poetry, the Great Wall and Kung Fu does not mean mastering the essence of Chinese culture. Only by understanding the cultural significance and values behind these cultural facts can they truly understand the essential characteristics of Chinese culture. "Blindly pursuing simple and experienced cultural activities, when students express their desire to hold more cultural activities, they inevitably have the intention to escape from learning. Cultural teaching should not stay in a single form, nor should there be only one form.

4.2 Cultural Teaching and Language Teaching Are Separated, and the Purpose Is not Strong

Wu Zhongwei (2022) summarizes three approaches to combining the teaching of Chinese culture and the teaching of the Chinese language: (1) take the teaching of Chinese culture as the core goal and pay attention to the teaching of the Chinese language; (2) take the cultivation of comprehensive Chinese ability as the core goal and pay attention to the teaching of Chinese culture; (3) attach equal importance to the teaching of Chinese language and the teaching of Chinese culture. At present, most Confucius Institutes take a random and balanced approach to teaching Chinese. When asked whether cultural teaching is integrated with current language teaching, 83.33% of the volunteers chose sometimes integration, while only 8.33% of the volunteers chose always integration. Even some of the feedback is not very integrated. Such random consideration and strong mobility are easy to bring unexpected happiness, such as loving the culture of paper-cutting in the paper-cutting class. They can also express their forms in Chinese. There are also some problems, such as strong segregation. Students do not know the meaning of this activity, but suddenly they have experiential activities. There is no preconception about what they will learn and what they will do after learning, which easily increases the cognitive load. Pupils' brains produce excessive memory load to complete learning tasks such as words and sentences. The internal cognitive load depends not only on the difficulty of the learning content itself but also on the amount of contact with the learning content. In the context of cultural teaching activities, which are held almost every month, cultural teaching and language teaching are separated. In the cultural activities, students do not have access to the learning content that is consistent with the textbook but add new content to learn. In the long run, students tend to feel that this activity is unnecessary and their enthusiasm is discouraged.

Table 3. The Integration of Culture Teaching and Language Teaching

Always fit in	8.33%
Sometimes blend in	83.33%
Don't quite fit in	8.33%
Don't blend in at all	0%
unclear	0%

When asked about the purpose of cultural teaching, most volunteers said it was to celebrate traditional Chinese festivals such as Spring Festival, accounting for 33.33%. Every country has its festivals, so it is difficult for students at Confucius Institutes to accept a Chinese festival in a short time. For example, we know about Christmas in foreign countries mainly through TV series and other media channels. We also know that Christmas is a very important holiday in foreign countries only when there are lots of Christmas trees and other products in the shops before Christmas. Under the influence of this kind of "silent moistening", we slowly understand and accept the festival. In the survey, 66.67% of the cultural

teaching methods used by Confucius Institutes are a combination of teachers' explanations and students' experiences. However, it is difficult for students to empathize with teachers' explanations and some simple activities in the process of cultural teaching, and they may only feel novelty.

At present, almost all Confucius Institutes are established with domestic universities, while only 25 percent of the cultural teaching is used to promote the cooperation of Confucius Institutes. According to the survey, overseas students at Confucius Institutes are mainly university students aged between 19 and 22. This is in line with the age and educational background of overseas students enrolled in China. The reason why the enrollment of Confucius Institutes in China have not been actively converted into high-level students is not unrelated to the lack of communication between Confucius Institutes and universities. Cultural education has become a castle in the air that needs to be built. How to make a more specific China better known and understood by students through cultural education is an urgent problem for Confucius Institutes to solve.

4.3 The Lack of Localized Teachers

Table 4. Number of Local Teachers

Many	0%
Several	41.67%
Have a	33.33%
None	25%

As Table 4 shows, most Confucius Institutes have a small number of localized teachers, but the proportion of these teachers involved in language teaching is higher at 73.33%. Some Confucius Institutes have no localized teachers at all. The lack of localized teachers and the frequent influx of overseas teachers due to local policies have brought great instability to Confucius Institutes, which is not conducive to the development of teaching activities and also poses a new test for the sustainability of Confucius Institutes. At present, 41.67% of students think that local teachers are no different from expatriate teachers, and 33.33% think that local teachers are more acceptable than expatriate teachers. But on the one hand, from the perspective of Chinese cultural communication, Lu Jianming believes that "an important channel for Chinese culture to go to the world is to rely on sinologists, Chinese translators and local Chinese teachers who have learned and mastered written Chinese to introduce Chinese culture to people in their countries and translate ancient and modern Chinese classics, including film and television works, into their languages. On the other hand, there are not a few Chinese learners with instrumental motivation for learning, employment in Chinese is not widely available, and their families do not approve. If excellent learners in Confucius Institutes can be turned into local teachers, not only can local people gradually improve their recognition and understanding of Chinese, but also more employment opportunities can be provided for learners and more

employment-motivated learners can learn Chinese.

In this survey, when the volunteers were asked whether they knew the skills with strong regional cultural characteristics in China (see Table 5), such as Beijing opera, Suzhou embroidery, etc., most of the volunteers said that they knew a lot about it, and 58.33% of the volunteers could master one or more skills with regional cultural characteristics in China. As shown in the following table, 66.67% of the volunteers thought that the sent teachers were the same as the localized teachers, and only 8.33% thought that the localized teachers were better, which is one of the reasons for the low conversion rate of the localized teachers. As the expatriate teachers had little communication with the local teachers, they did not want to train their students to become local teachers. Although 58.33% of volunteers agreed that cultural education helps to spread Chinese culture, it is not clear how and through what. Confucius Institutes, including teachers working in Confucius Institutes, still lack awareness in this regard.

Table 5. Understanding of Regional Culture

Know very well	8.33%
Better understand	66.67%
Don't know much about	25%
Have no idea	0%
other	0%

5. Possible Strategies and Methods

5.1 Ratings of Teaching, According to the Sketch Teaching

Zhang Ying (1994) believes that culture is embodied in language, but cultural teaching and language teaching should have a corresponding emphasis on different learning stages of learners. For primary students, emphasis should be placed on teaching knowledge of the language, knowledge of culture, and cultural content should not be too much. At the intermediate stage, practical content can be added to oral Chinese classes, while comprehensive Chinese classes should pay attention to the systematic cultural content and combine the knowledge in the textbook with culture. In the advanced stage, cultural teaching should be distributed, and students can understand the deep culture of China under the guidance of teachers. Wu Jizhong (2022), when encouraging local culture teaching to integrate into Chinese classroom teaching, also proposed to follow the principle of phased teaching, and took Ansai Waist Drum in northern Shaanxi as an example to tell the key points of learning at different stages. He also pointed out that although local cultural teaching is helpful for international students coming to study in a certain region of China to reduce cultural shock, it is also difficult for Confucius Institutes to practice due to geographical restrictions.

Huang Jin (2021) prospects the application of regional culture in international Chinese education

through the regional culture courses offered by universities on the network platform in the post-epidemic era. Ma Xiaole (2022) proposed the method of experiential cultural teaching by taking the New Liberal Arts Laboratory of Shandong University as an example. The laboratory not only sent subject members to Confucius Institutes for training and cultural promotion but also cooperated with Chinese teachers' associations in Canada and Thailand and other organizations during the epidemic period to carry out online "cloud experience" themed salons and share cultural experience courses for Chinese learners at different levels in middle and high schools. Such experiential cultural courses use virtual simulation technology to solve the problem of limited time and space and also provide a new idea for regional culture to better integrate into cultural teaching.

In the future, Confucius Institutes can jointly create online regional culture courses with their cooperative universities. By taking advantage of the rich academic features of comprehensive universities, they can promote the integration of VR and other technologies into cultural teaching courses, so that overseas students can truly touch the current China. Wu Yongyi (2023) points out that the Framework of Reference for Teaching Chinese Culture and National Conditions in International Chinese Education has four dimensions: one is "cultural knowledge", the other is "cultural understanding", the third is "cross-cultural awareness" and the fourth is "cultural attitude". In the past teaching, in China taught by teachers has lag and unreality for students. In terms of cultural knowledge, students only explain the words "Great Wall" in books, let alone understand the connotation of Chinese culture and cultivate a sense of comparison between Chinese and foreign cultures. In the selection of cultural teaching, Confucius Institutes can make use of the Reference Frame. There are more than 700 cultural points at the third level in the "Frame of Reference", which means that teachers are highly selective and malleable. From the simple to the deep, the combination of virtual and real culture teaching is the best solution in the situation of more and more international students in China.

5.2 Create Distinctive Confucius Institutes

According to the survey by Teng Yishu (2017), when foreign youth groups contact with Chinese culture, people of different ages will show interest in contact with heterogeneous Chinese culture due to economic factors or ontological needs such as leisure desire. Therefore, Confucius Institutes must consider the diverse ontological needs of students when building characteristic brands.

For the students who take Chinese learning as their interest, Collins pointed out that "communal boiling" is a collective emotion shared by the participants, in which the excitement and enthusiasm experienced by the individuals eventually converge into the general emotional unity of the group members, and once the group is dissolved, the emotional solidarity within the group will collapse. If the Confucius Institute only uses certain Chinese talents as a gimmick to attract students and then no longer reflects them in teaching, students without repeated emotional stimulation will have a negative mood toward learning Chinese. This requires the Confucius Institute to make a careful decision and implement it all the time after comprehensive consideration when building its characteristic brand. At the same time, Confucius Institutes can begin to train local talented teachers to give students long-term

instrumental motivation in addition to the impulse of interest. The localization training of Chinese talents can show the interdisciplinary and multi-dimensional characteristics of the Chinese language so that the promotion of the Chinese language can get multiple support and fully integrate into the local culture.

For students who have sufficient interest in Chinese and hope to engage in Chinese-related work in the future, Confucius Institutes are required to conduct HSK tests to facilitate students' assessment of their Chinese proficiency and meet their need for employment with HSK certificates. The Confucius Institute at Neitu University, the world's first Confucius Institute established by Hanban and a university sponsored by a Chinese enterprise, was established in 2016. Harbin Normal University, grasping the demand for local talents in enterprises as far away as Angola in Africa, established the first Confucius Institute in the region in cooperation with CITIC Construction. It is based on the market, from the economic construction as the entry point, and has made contributions to the cultural exchanges between China and Africa. At the same time, he also realized that the best way to solve the problem of foreign cultural rejection is to train local Chinese teachers. The Confucius Institute of Neitu University launched a Chinese teaching competition in 2021. This is based on the students, from the cultivation of people to the cultivation of cultural identity. At the same time, domestic colleges and universities can use Confucius Institutes to provide accurate consulting services for students to further their study in Chinese, so that both schools and students can "know themselves and know their enemies". The formation of a strong stable, high-quality talent development belt. The strong turnover of Confucius Institute teachers can also be solved through this talent development belt. Training localized teachers with experience and an in-depth understanding of Chinese culture and providing students with a new direction in employment can not only increase students' dependence on Confucius Institutes but also improve local people's recognition of Chinese and stickiness in their demand for Chinese learning.

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