Original Paper

A Case Design on Cultivation of Integrating Digital Pedagogy and Enhancing Students' Intercultural Competence in English Literature Reading Course

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Abstract

Since the concept of liberal English education was put forward, artificial intelligence and information technology have developed rapidly, and digitization has become a new form of human survival and development. The newly issued National Standards for the Quality of Foreign Language and Literature Teaching (2018) by the Ministry of National Education (hereinafter referred to as "the Standard") and the National Ordinary Institutions of Higher Learning Foreign Language Literature Specialty Teaching Guide and the Syllabus (2020) (hereinafter referred to as "the Teaching Guide") clearly point out that the cultivation of intercultural competence should be regarded as an important ability of English students and the teaching of foreign language courses in universities should serve the diverse needs of foreign language talents in the country, the pluralistic needs of local economic and social development, and the personalized needs of students' development. Therefore, in order to enhance college students' autonomous study ability and intercultural competence, in this paper, the author presents a case design on integrating digital pedagogy into the English Literature Reading course to enhance students' intercultural competence. In the context of digitization of educational and globalization, digital technologies such as AI and VR are employed. Through pre-class preparation, in-class implementation, and post-class extension, students are guided to compare Chinese and Western cultures, which helps cultivate their intercultural awareness and skills. The research contributes to digital pedagogy and intercultural education theories and provides practical implications for curriculum design and student development.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Under the impetus of *the Standard* and *Teaching Guide*, foreign language teaching in China's universities and colleges should boldly explore new theories and methods for foreign language education and teaching, new models and mechanisms for talent cultivation, as well as new platforms and paths for the deep integration of intelligent technologies with foreign language education. It is essential to comprehensively integrate various talent cultivation resources inside and outside universities, as well as at home and abroad; to fully stimulate the teaching enthusiasm and creativity of all teachers, and the learning motivation and potential of all students; and to continue forging ahead to build a world-class foreign language education system with Chinese characteristics in higher education, thus making new contributions to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind.

Digitization of education has witnessed a remarkable upsurge in recent years, significantly influencing foreign language and literature teaching. It can be observed that the enormous resource storage capacity and resource-sharing functions of the Internet can break the time and space limitations in English classroom teaching, enabling students to study anytime and anywhere (Siti Rochmiyati, Imam Ghozali, and Luky Tiasari, 2020). Digital technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality (VR), and supporting tools such as various online learning platforms, have revolutionized the educational landscape in higher education. In foreign language and literature courses, students can gain an immersive learning experience with the help of AI technology and have access to a wide range of learning resources, thereby increasing their participation. For instance, DeepSeek, as one of the representative AI-assisted learning tools, is capable of analyzing students' learning patterns and offering tailored learning recommendations, thereby enhancing the efficiency of the learning process.

Simultaneously, the importance of improving students' intercultural competence in higher education has been heightened with the acceleration of globalization. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, students are required to engage with diverse cultures in academic, professional, and social arenas. In the English Literature Reading Course, students are able to delve deeper into the cultural subtleties within literary works by developing their intercultural competence, thereby facilitating effective intercultural communication and fostering a global mindset.

1.2 Research Objectives and Significance

The following are the main objectives of the case design:

The central objective of this research is to explore the integration of digital technologies into the English Literature Reading Course to enhance students' intercultural competence (encompassing intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes through different cultures). By leveraging digital tools, this study aims to encourage students to compare Chinese and Western cultures during the course, fostering their intercultural skills and strengthening their sense of local cultural identity.

The significance of this case design contains two aspects:

Theoretically, this study enriches the fields of digital pedagogy and intercultural education by providing empirical evidence for the effectiveness of digital technologies in promoting intercultural learning in the context of English literature teaching, thereby further contributing to existing theoretical frameworks. Additionally, the author offers novel perspectives on integrating digital resources and activities into intercultural education, deepens students' understanding of the relationship between digitalization of education and the development of intercultural competence, and helps students fully leverage digital technologies to cultivate intercultural competence throughout their learning process.

Practically, the findings of this research have certain importance implications for curriculum design and student development. For curriculum design, it offers insights into incorporating digital elements into the English Literature Reading Course to make it more engaging and effective in cultivating intercultural competence. For student development, it equips students with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in a globalized world, preparing them for future academic and professional pursuits that demand intercultural communication competence.
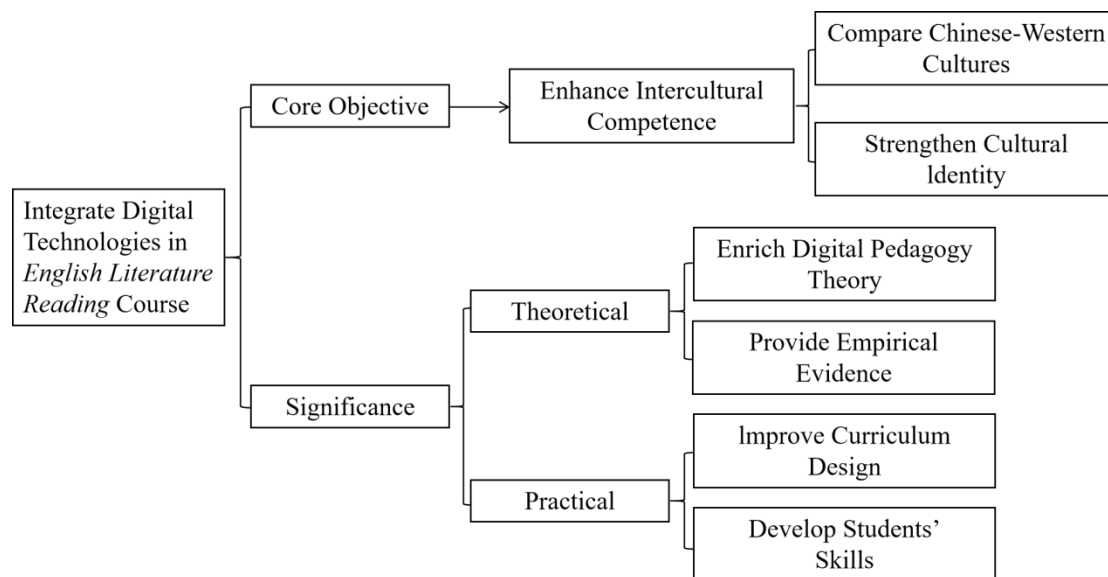

Figure 1. Research Objectives and Significance

2. Literature Review

2.1 Digitization of Education and Curriculum Innovation

The digitization of education involves the application of digital technologies to transform the teaching and learning process. In the realm of higher education, digital transformation has become a global trend. AI-assisted learning, like the one provided by DeepSeek, has the potential to revolutionize education by offering personalized learning experiences, instant feedback, and in-depth analysis capabilities of complex concepts. AI-Assisted Language Learning provides robust support in writing, speaking, vocabulary, and reading. Furthermore, it facilitates the improvement of students' language proficiency through real-time feedback and personalized learning pathways (Huang, 2023).

The study of digitalization began with Alvin Toffler's *The Third Wave* in the 1980s, followed by Nicholas Negroponte's *Being Digital* in the 1990s, and Esther Dyson's *Release 2.0: A Design for Living in the Digital Age* at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. Nicholas Negroponte, known as "the first person to provide a panoramic vision and predictive study of humanity's networked existence", described with extremely forward-looking insight in his book *Being Digital*—which caused a sensation in western society—the profound changes that the application of digital technologies would bring to human life forms. Polikoff, Dean (2019) and other scholars have found that information technology has gradually become a new form of English classroom teaching, and the effective integration of English classroom teaching with information technology is the key to boosting the "transformation" of English classroom teaching (Northrop Laura, 2021). Nowadays, social media applications can significantly impact on English language learning in the classroom and outside of it thanks to new technologies and the widespread use of mobile devices (Akylbek Meirbekov, 2024).

In recent years, China has attached increasing importance to the digital transformation of higher education. National smart education platforms such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and *Chaoxing.com* have helped achieve the goal of learning for all, everywhere, and anytime by placing educational resources on internet platforms to enable "national learning". Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education has issued the *Education Informatization 2.0 Action Plan*, emphasizing "promoting the renewal of educational concepts, transforming models, and reconstructing systems," and formulated the *Standards for Digital Literacy of Teachers*, which regulate teacher development from five dimensions: digital awareness, digital technology knowledge and skills, digital applications, digital social responsibility, and professional development. These provide top-level design and action guidelines for the digital transformation of teaching in colleges and universities. These policies have profound implications for language teaching, guiding educators to integrate digital technologies into foreign language courses to improve teaching quality.
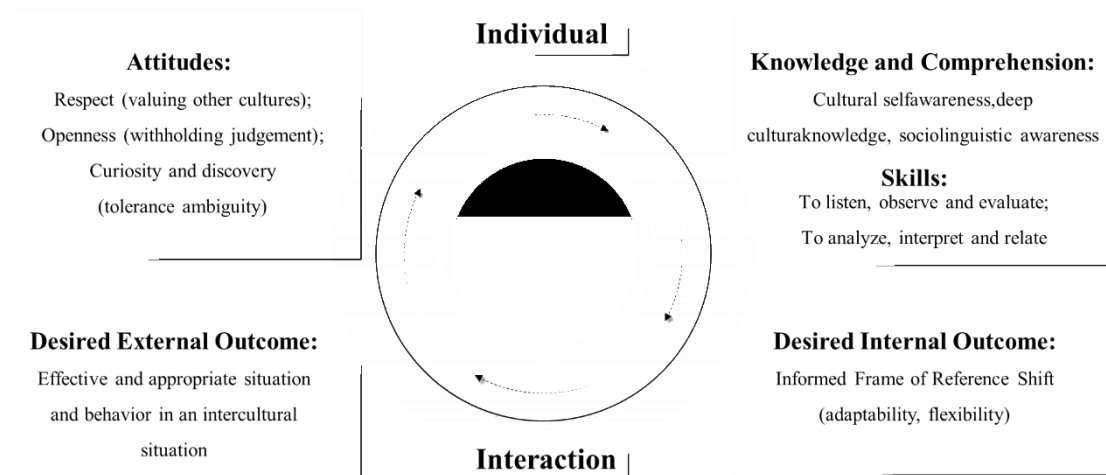
The digital transformation of education requires teaching to shift from the imparting of knowledge to the guidance of values, and it enhances teaching effectiveness through technologies such as virtual

simulation and intelligent evaluation. Not only is this transformation an inevitable trend in the development of educational technology but it is also an inherent requirement for implementing the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education.

2.2 Intercultural Competence in Language Teaching

With the continuous advancement of globalization, intercultural competence, as a crucial component for enhancing students' overall quality and strengthening cultural confidence, has increasingly gained attention from both domestic and international education circle. As China's economic and cultural exchanges with other countries become more frequent, there is an urgent need for a contingent of internationalized talents with strong intercultural competence. In China, foreign language education represents the most active field in intercultural competence research, and the cultivation of intercultural competence has become a topic of widespread concern in the foreign language education community.

Research on intercultural competence abroad began in the 1960s, initially aiming to solve practical problems in intercultural communication through the study of intercultural competence. In the field of intercultural research, Ortis used the self-created concept of "transculturality" to describe Cuba's colonial history, aiming to more accurately reflect the historical integration of the country's native culture and the cultures of colonial powers. Building on Ortis's theoretical research, Dussel argued for the reciprocity of cultural reshaping in intercultural processes. Byram (1997) defined intercultural competence from the perspective of civic education, suggesting that citizens with intercultural experiences reflect on their own experiences in four aspects: knowledge and skills, behavior, action, and emotional attitudes, thereby significantly enriching the meaning of intercultural competence. Concerning its components, Howard (1998) constructed an intercultural competence model consisting of three dimensions—attitudes, skills, and knowledge—based on a trichotomous framework. Regarding the formation and development of intercultural competence, Liddicoat (2002) proposed that intercultural-oriented English teaching should enhance students' competence to use English in intercultural contexts. In terms of defining intercultural competence, the academic community generally endorses Deardorff's (2006) conceptualization. He defines intercultural competence as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations, based on intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes." With the development of the times, academic definitions of intercultural competence have evolved, continuously enriching its connotations.

Individual

Attitudes:
Respect (valuing other cultures);
Openness (withholding judgement);
Curiosity and discovery
(tolerance ambiguity)

Knowledge and Comprehension:
Cultural selfawareness,deep
culturaknowledge, sociolinguistic awareness
Skills:
To listen, observe and evaluate;
To analyze, interpret and relate

Desired External Outcome:
Effective and appropriate situation
and behavior in an intercultural
situation

Desired Internal Outcome:
Informed Frame of Reference Shift
(adaptability, flexibility)

Interaction

Figure 2. Deardorff's Model of Intercultural Competence Development

2.3 The English Literature Reading Course: A Course to Develop Critical Thinking from a Intercultural Perspective Through English Literature Reading

English Literature Reading Course, as a core course for English majors, plays a vital role in highlighting the core literacy of the English discipline and fulfilling its educational value. The course primarily introduces the emergence of literary schools in different historical periods of Britain and the United States, biographies of classical authors, and selected readings and appreciations of classic Anglo-American literary works (including genres such as poetry, essays, novels, and dramas), thereby helping students understand the social backgrounds and cultural contexts of the eras in which the authors lives.

Meanwhile, with correct ideological guidance as its foundation, the course guides students to maintain a Chinese perspective while studying Anglo-American literature, compare and contrast Chinese and foreign literary works, and adopt a critical mindset to absorb the essence of these works and discard their dross. Through learning Anglo-American literary works, students can better understand their cultures, thereby telling Chinese stories effectively through comparisons between relevant Chinese and foreign literary works, spreading excellent Chinese literary works globally, and showcasing Chinese classics to the world.

Through this course, students can thoroughly understand and master English language knowledge and skills from cultural and social perspectives, enhance their comprehension of diverse cultures, cultivate intercultural communication competence through Chinese-Western cultural comparisons, and improve their ability to apply the English language. It will be possible to disseminate local culture, promote exchanges and mutual learning among diverse cultures, and cultivate qualified new-generation foreign language professionals (Cao Xiaoling, 2024).

2.4 *The Garden of Forking Paths*: A Novel to Explore Chinese-Western Philosophies via Forking Temporalities and Cultural Harmonies in Interlaced Spatialities
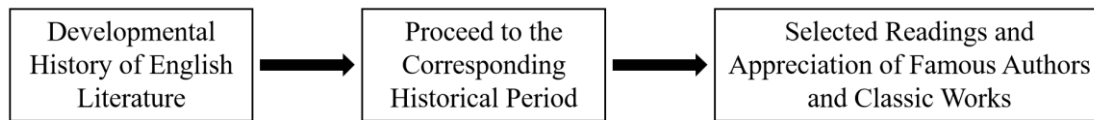
Set during World War I, *The Garden of Forking Paths* follows Yu Tsun, a former English teacher at Tsingtao Hochschule and a German spy, who must transmit the location of British artillery parks on the Ancre to Berlin while evading pursuit by Captain Richard Madden. Fleeing to the village of Ashgrove, Yu targets Stephen Albert, a Sinologist whose surname matches the secret city name he needs to reveal. In Albert's garden, the scholar interprets Yu's ancestor Ts'ui Pen's legacy: a novel and labyrinth symbolizing time as an infinite, branching network of parallel futures. Yu kills Albert to complete his mission, is arrested, and is condemned to hang, though his act succeeds in delivering the intelligence. The story blends espionage with metaphysical inquiry, exploring time's nonlinear nature through Eastern philosophy filtered by Western interpretation.

Rooted in Borges's seminal work *The Garden of Forking Paths*, this curricular design requires students to navigate among Eastern and Western historical, philosophical, and literary traditions during textual interpretation. By analyzing characters' identity dilemmas, intercultural semiotic transpositions, and the metaphorical narrative architecture, not only does the course enhance multicultural textual analysis skills but it also cultivates intercultural literacy—an intellectual capacity embracing cognitive diversity, critical engagement with conflicts, and the pursuit of shared humanity within labyrinthine cultural pathways. Such competency equips global learners with both a hermeneutic key to decipher our complex world and an architectural framework for constructing substantive intercultural dialogues.

3. Traditional Teaching Paradigms and Digital Transformation

3.1 Limitations of Traditional Teaching Model

Currently, the teaching of the English Literature Reading Course commonly adopts a traditional model that integrates lectures on the development history of English literature with selected readings of and appreciation for prominent authors and their classic works of the corresponding historical periods. The lack of integration of Chinese elements in this model has resulted in most English major students lacking awareness of and understanding of Chinese culture while studying English literature, and even less knowledge about the thoughts of Chinese fine traditional culture and classic Chinese literary works. Coupled with the fact that traditional English literature teaching neglects Chinese fine traditional culture, students often experience the phenomenon of "cultural aphasia" when using English, making it difficult for them to convey Chinese culture to the world in English. Thus, the field of English education inevitably faces the imbalance between Chinese and Western cultures and the unbalanced development of the global language and culture ecosystem in English education.

Developmental History of English Literature	→	Proceed to the Corresponding Historical Period	→	Selected Readings and Appreciation of Famous Authors and Classic Works

Figure 3. Traditional Teaching Model

Traditional teaching methods in English Literature Reading courses often over-emphasize linguistic analysis, primarily focusing on grammar, vocabulary, and literary devices. This approach tends to overlook ideological and cultural critical analysis, which are crucial for achieving a comprehensive understanding of literary works. Students passively passively receive knowledge when studying Anglo-American literature, with their understanding of literary works remaining superficial and lacking in-depth analysis. For example, when analyzing a text, students may fail to recognize the cultural biases or power dynamics embedded within it. Furthermore, traditional teaching lacks interactive tools to visualize abstract concepts. In a work like *The Garden of Forking Paths*, concepts such as "time bifurcation" pose challenges for students to comprehend through traditional lecture-based teaching alone. Without effective visual aids, students may struggle to grasp the complex relationships among different elements in the story.

3.2 Digital Innovations in English Literature Reading Course

The application of digital technologies can offer innovative solutions for addressing the limitations of traditional teaching. In the pre-class stage, AI-generated concept maps, such as those related to "time imagery", can assist students in constructing an intercultural semantic network. By visualizing the relationships between time-related concepts in different cultures, students can better understand the cultural connotations of literary works. During the in-class stage, VR technology can be utilized to recreate scenes such as the Suzhou garden maze. This enables students to compare the spatial metaphors in Borges's works with the spatial metaphors in Chinese literature, such as comparing the maze in the story with the garden paths in Chinese gardens to identify their similarities and differences. In the post-class stage, TikTok serves as a platform for students to disseminate Chinese philosophical ideas globally. By creating and sharing bilingual short videos, students can introduce concepts like the *Taoist* time-view and the co-existence of *yin* and *yang* to a global audience, thereby promoting cultural exchange.

Table 1. The Design of Digital Innovations in English Literature Reading Course

Teaching Stage	Digital Tool/Method	Objective	Deardorff's model
Pre-class	AI-generated concept maps (e.g., "time imagery")	Construct intercultural semantic networks to connect core imagery (time and space) in literature.	Attitude
In-class	VR reconstruction of Suzhou Garden scenes	Compare spatial metaphors in Borges' works and Chinese literature (e.g., labyrinths vs. winding paths in gardens).	Knowledge and Comprehension
Post-class	TikTok short video creation	Disseminate Chinese philosophical ideas globally (e.g., *Taoist* concept of time, symbiosis of *yin* and *yang*).	Skills

4. Case Study: Cultivation Pathways for Intercultural Competence and Digital Pedagogy in *The Garden of Forking Paths*

4.1 Pre-class Preparation: Cultural Grounding

During the pre-class preparation stage, the focus is to establish a foundational understanding of intercultural communication via digital tools. Students are tasked to write reflective journals on the topic of "linear time (West) vs. cyclic time (China)" comparing Western linear time (e.g., Newtonian physics, clock-based time systems) and Chinese cyclic time (e.g., the 24 Solar Terms, the concept of "cyclic movement" in the *Tao Te Ching*). They can use AI annotation tools like DeepSeek to help them to broaden their ideas and to edit their mistakes of language. AI tools generate keyword maps (e.g., "time → maze → cyclicity → *yin-yang*") to visualize intercultural semantic connections. Additionally, students watch VR-generated animations of Chinese gardens (e.g., Suzhou Gardens) and documentary clips on the "time visualization" in Dunhuang murals, linking spatial metaphors like "winding paths leading to seclusion" with the story's "maze" motif.

Table 2. The Design of Pre-class Preparation: Cultural Grounding in *The Garden of Forking Paths*

<table>
<tr><td align="center">Pre-class Preparation Worksheet</td></tr>
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Objective

To establish a foundational understanding of Chinese-Western time philosophy and cultural symbols through digital tools, students will get preparation for in-class analysis.

Implementation

1. **AI-Assisted Reflective Journals**
   - **Task**: Students use AI annotation tools (e.g., DeepSeek) to analyze the contrast between Western linear time (e.g., Newtonian physics, clock-based scheduling) and Chinese cyclic time (e.g., *24 Solar Terms*, *Tao Te Ching*'s "周行而不殆" *cyclic movement*).
   - **Process**:
     - Students upload reflections on prompts like: *"How does Borges's 'time bifurcation' relate to Taoist concepts of '混沌' (chaos) and '分形' (fractal)?"*
     - AI tools generate keyword maps (e.g., "time → maze → cyclicity → yin-yang") to visualize intercultural semantic networks.
   - **Example Resource**:
     - Documentary clips from *The Art Of DunHuang* comparing Dunhuang murals' "flying apsaras" (representing timelessness) with Borges' interviews on "infinite time loops".

2. **Multimedia Pre-Reading**
   - Students watch VR-generated animations of Chinese gardens (e.g., Suzhou's Humble Administrator's Garden) to observe spatial metaphors like "曲径通幽" (*winding paths leading to seclusion*), pre-linking to the story's "maze" motif.

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4.2 In-class Implementation: Multidimensional Engagement

During in-class implementation, digital tools enable immersive and interactive learning. In a VR-simulated "Suzhou Garden maze", students are able to navigate while analyzing the story, contrasting the Western maze's symbolism of confusion with the Chinese garden's representation of harmonious exploration of "the interplay of reality and illusion". VR scenario simulation is a powerful in-class learning tool. By navigating a virtual "Suzhou garden maze" through VR, students can directly experience the spatial layout of Chinese gardens and compare it with the maze-like structures in Borges' works. This hands-on experience helps students better understand the spatial metaphors in

literature and the cultural values behind them. For critical debates on whether Borges' "Chinese garden" constitutes cultural appropriation, students can use AI research assistants (e.g., ChatGPT) to retrieve theories like Edward Said's "Orientalism" and Fei Xiaotong's "cultural awareness", and engage in online discussions guided by Professor Sun Youzhong's CREED principle of "Critiquing", which emphasizes analyzing cultural context, representation, and ethical implications. With the assistant of AI, students can analyze and evaluate different viewpoints, develop their critical thinking skills, and enhance their understanding of cultural issues in literature.

Table 3. The Design of In-class Implementation: Multidimensional Engagement in *The Garden of Forking Paths*

In-class Implementation Worksheet
Objective
To use digital tools for immersive analysis of cultural symbols and critical debates, fostering intercultural critical thinking.
1. VR Scenario Simulation: Spatial Metaphors in Literature
• **Activity**: Students navigate a VR-rendered "Suzhou garden maze" while reading excerpts from *The Garden of Forking Paths*.
• **Comparative Analysis**:
○ **Western Maze**: Represents confusion, entrapment (e.g., Minotaur myth).
○ **Chinese Garden**: Symbolizes harmonious exploration of "虚实相生" (*interplay of reality and illusion*, 《园冶》*Yuanye*).
• **Digital Tool**: VR headsets with embedded AI commentary (e.g., "Notice how the garden's 'borrowed scenery' mirrors Borges' layered narratives").
2. AI-Assisted Debates on Cultural Representation
• **Topic**: *"Is Borges' 'Chinese garden' an act of cultural appropriation or intercultural dialogue?"*
• **Digital Support**:
○ **AI Research Assistants**: Students use ChatGPT to retrieve theories (e.g., Edward Said's "Orientalism", Fei Xiaotong's "cultural awareness").
○ **Online Debate Platform**: Students post arguments with timestamped citations (e.g., Borges' letter admitting "non-systematic knowledge of Taoism").
• **Guiding Framework**: Professor Sun Youzhong's CREED principle of "Critiquing":
○ Cultural context: Analyze Borges' 1940s Argentina as a "periphery" negotiating Western and non-Western ideas.
○ Representation: Critique stereotypes (e.g., "mystical China" vs. historical realities

of garden design).

- o Ethical implications: Discuss responsibilities of global authors in representing "other" cultures.

4.3 Post-class Extension: Transmedia Practice

In post-class extension, trans-media practice promotes cultural dissemination and self-reflection. Students could work in groups to create bilingual TikTok short videos re-imagining the story in historical Chinese settings (e.g., Tang Dynasty Chang'an), using AI script generators to incorporate classical poetry (e.g., Wang Wei's verses) and AR filters to visualize "*yin-yang*" symbols for parallel universes. By integrating Chinese cultural elements and philosophical ideas into the video, students can showcase their understanding of intercultural concepts and promote Chinese fine traditional culture globally. Peer review via online platforms is an important part of the assessment. Peer reviews could be conducted on platforms like Padlet assess cultural authenticity, critical reinterpretation, and digital innovation. Focusing on these aspects, students can learn from each other, broaden their views, and further enhance their intercultural competence.

Table 4. The Design of Post-class Extension: Trans-media Practice in *The Garden of Forking Paths*

Post-class Extension Worksheet

Objective

To apply intercultural insights through creative digital projects, enhancing cultural dissemination and self-reflection.

1. TikTok Short Video Production: Time-Branching Narratives

- **Task**: Groups create 90-second bilingual videos retelling *The Garden of Forking Paths* in a Chinese historical setting (e.g., Tang Dynasty Chang'an).
- **Digital Tools**:
  - o **AI Script Generators**: Convert classical Chinese poetry (e.g., Wang Wei's verses like "I'd go as far as the end of a stream or fountain and sit and gaze on cloud rising over the mountain.") into dialogue reflecting "time bifurcation".
  - o **AR Filters**: Overlay "*yin-yang*" symbols on scenes to visualize parallel universes.
- **Cultural Authenticity Criteria**:
  - o Inclusion of Tang Dynasty elements: imperial exams, counting rods, Dunhuang frescoes.
  - o Alignment with Taoist philosophy: "分岔即回归" (bifurcation as return), inspired

by *I Ching*'s "复卦" (Returning Hexagram).

2. Peer Review and Global Outreach

- **Assessment Platform**: Padlet wall with rubrics:
  - **Cultural Authenticity** (40%): Accuracy of historical/cultural depictions.
  - **Critical Reinterpretation** (30%): How well the video subverts Western stereotypes (e.g., showing Tang scholars as cosmopolitan thinkers).
  - **Digital Innovation** (30%): Use of AI/AR to enhance intercultural storytelling.
- **Dissemination**: Top videos are published on TikTok with hashtags #TimeBranchingChina and #BorgesInTranslation, inviting global audiences to comment on cultural representations.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the digitalized, comparative, and experiential approaches in "Global Village" have effectively cultivated students' intercultural competence. Digital technologies, including AI, VR, and online platforms, have provided new means for students to engage with literature, facilitating cultural comparison and experiential learning. Through pre-class cultural grounding, in-class multidimensional engagement, and post-class trans-media practice, students have not only improved their understanding of English literature but also enhanced their intercultural competence.

The application of digital technologies has also promoted the continuous development of foreign literature courses. It has made the teaching process more interactive, engaging, and effective in achieving educational goals. Future research can further explore how to optimize the integration of digital technologies in literature teaching to better cultivate students' intercultural competence and meet the challenges of globalization.

Acknowledgement

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Notes