

# Exploring the Close Relationship Between the Dissemination of Chinese as a Foreign Language and Cultural Promotion

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## ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the integral relationship between Chinese language teaching and cultural dissemination in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL). It demonstrates how cultural elements embedded in linguistic forms - from self-deprecating expressions to character construction - fundamentally shape communicative competence. Through comparative analysis of cultural concepts and pragmatic examples, the study reveals how cultural awareness prevents misinterpretations and enhances intercultural communication. The study proposes a three-dimensional pedagogical framework combining: 1) cultural-linguistic integration in vocabulary instruction, 2) contrastive cultural analysis, and 3) immersive learning environments. It highlights the educator's dual role as language instructor and cultural mediator, emphasizing the need for balanced cultural-linguistic curricula. The paper concludes with practical strategies for developing learners' intercultural communicative competence through authentic materials and scenario-based learning.

## KEYWORDS

Chinese language pedagogy; cultural transmission; intercultural competence; pragmatic teaching; instructional strategies

## 1 Introduction

Language and culture are inextricably linked, with language serving as a carrier of culture and embodying rich cultural connotations. Hu Mingyang (1993) emphasized that cultural content closely related to language should be integrated into the process of language dissemination. He identified six types of cultural factors—including vocabulary, expressions, and linguistic habits—that are most likely to directly influence language acquisition and usage. Additionally, numerous studies have systematically categorized cultural elements, particularly those pertaining to communicative culture, from various perspectives.

Fundamentally, the dissemination of Chinese as a foreign language aims to enable learners and enthusiasts to master the language and utilize it appropriately in communication. To achieve this objective, it is essential to emphasize the cultural dimensions embedded within Chinese language instruction. Effectively leveraging the transmission of cultural factors can significantly enhance language dissemination and promotion, playing a pivotal role in its advancement and deepening.

## 2 The inseparable connection between language dissemination and cultural promotion

The dissemination of language must inherently include cultural transmission, a necessity dictated by the intrinsic relationship between language and culture. Language serves as both a symbol and a carrier of culture, reflecting the characteristics of a nation—not only its historical and cultural background but also its worldview, lifestyle, and cognitive patterns. Language and culture are interdependent, mutually constraining, and deeply intertwined. Cultural permeation in language is ubiquitous, and this is particularly evident in the case of Chinese culture's influence on the Chinese language. Chinese characters contain rich cultural information. For instance, many Chinese words expressing thoughts and emotions incorporate the radical "心" (heart), such as 忘 (forget), 想 (think), 忆 (recall), 愿 (wish), 怨 (resent), 愁 (worry), 恕 (forgive), 悦 (joy), 愠 (anger), and 忍 (endure). This reflects the ancient Chinese belief that the heart was the organ responsible for thought and emotion. Numerous Chinese words and phrases encapsulate unique aspects of Chinese culture, including history, geography, customs, as well as expressions derived from literature, classical texts, religious scriptures, and colloquial speech. Without an explanation of their cultural origins and connotations, these terms can be difficult for learners to comprehend.

For example, Chinese people may refer to themselves using self-deprecating terms such as "不才" (a person of no talent), "老朽" (an old and useless person), or "鄙人" (your humble servant). Similarly, they may describe their opinions as "浅见" (superficial views), "陋见" (crude views), or "谬见" (erroneous views), and their works as "拙著" (clumsy writings), "拙文" (poorly written article), or "拙作" (inferior work). In language dissemination, it is crucial to clarify that such expressions do not imply genuine inadequacy but rather reflect the cultural virtue of humility in Chinese tradition.

Moreover, some idiomatic expressions, though absent from dictionaries, pose significant challenges for learners. For example, the word "东西" (thing) appears simple, but the phrase "不是东西" (literally "not a thing") is an insult meaning

"contemptible person." Without proper cultural explanation, such expressions can lead to communicative misunderstandings. Therefore, in the promotion of Chinese as a foreign language, dictionaries can only serve as supplementary tools; a more effective approach involves targeted cultural explanations to facilitate comprehension.

The ultimate goal of language learning is pragmatic competence—the ability to use language effectively in communication. The success of language dissemination is measured by whether learners can achieve meaningful and appropriate communication.

British linguist Neil Smith, in discussing communicative models of language, posited that verbal communication relies on three shared elements between speaker and listener:

- A shared linguistic knowledge (vocabulary and grammar);
- A shared body of non-linguistic knowledge and beliefs (cultural context);
- A shared set of inferential rules (pragmatic norms).

Smith's framework highlights that effective communication requires not only linguistic common ground but also shared cultural context—an understanding of social norms and conventions within a specific culture. Cultural differences can create barriers in communication. For example:

- A: 你最近怎么样? (How have you been lately?)
- B: 简直把我忙死了。(I've been swamped with work.)
- A: 看来你是个大忙人喽! (So you're a very busy person!)
- B: 瞎忙, 没忙什么。(Just busy with nothing important.)

To learners unfamiliar with Chinese culture, Speaker B's response may seem contradictory ("Am I busy or not?"). However, such expressions are common in Chinese, where modesty is highly valued. For instance, one might downplay their efforts by saying "胡乱凑了一篇" (I just threw something together) after writing a well-crafted essay, or "简单的吃点吧" (Let's just have a simple meal) when serving guests an elaborate feast.

Incorporating cultural elements into language teaching can also boost learners' interest and improve learning outcomes. Take Chinese character instruction, for example. Most Chinese characters are composed of multiple components, making them decomposable and analyzable. For non-native learners, characters are often the most challenging and tedious aspect of learning. However, introducing cultural explanations or engaging learners in character-based puzzles can make the process more enjoyable and effective. By embedding cultural insights into language instruction—such as explaining the historical evolution of characters or their symbolic meanings—teachers can transform a seemingly dry subject into an intellectually stimulating experience. This approach not only enhances retention but also fosters a deeper appreciation for the language. The dissemination of Chinese as a foreign language must be closely intertwined with cultural education. Language is not merely a system of symbols but a reflection of a people's identity, history, and worldview. Effective language teaching requires not only grammatical and lexical instruction but also cultural contextualization to ensure learners develop both accuracy and appropriateness in communication. By integrating cultural elements—whether through idiomatic expressions, pragmatic norms, or character-based learning—educators can enhance learners' motivation, comprehension.

### 3 Promoting Chinese culture in the dissemination of the Chinese language

As Confucius Institutes proliferate worldwide at an unprecedented pace and a global "Chinese fever" seems to emerge, it has become evident that the objectives of international Chinese education should encompass two core components: language dissemination and cultural promotion. However, in most current practices of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, linguistic instruction has effectively become the sole ultimate goal, while cultural promotion is relegated to a supplementary role rather than being treated as an independent and equally essential aspect of dissemination.

In reality, the depth and breadth of cultural transmission in Chinese language education remain significantly insufficient. Statistical data reveal a striking imbalance in China's international book trade, with an import-export ratio of approximately 10:1, where the majority of exported books are distributed within Asia and Chinese-speaking regions. The disparity with Western countries is even more pronounced, exceeding 100:1. The trade deficit in the film industry is even more severe. Despite China's rise as a leading exporter of consumer electronics, it faces a substantial deficit in cultural exports. Western civilization has long emphasized human dominance over nature, yet the irreversible environmental degradation caused by industrial advancement has compelled many Western scholars to reconsider China's traditional ecological philosophy, which advocates harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature. The essence of Chinese culture, and Daoism—contains profound wisdom that has garnered increasing admiration from Western philosophers. While we take pride in the intellectual legacy of our ancestors, we also bear the responsibility to disseminate these cultural treasures globally, enabling the world to truly understand and appreciate China.

By integrating cultural education more systematically into Chinese language instruction, we can transform linguistic learning into a holistic engagement with Chinese thought, values, and traditions. This approach not only enhances

learners' linguistic competence but also fosters cross-cultural appreciation, ultimately contributing to a more balanced and meaningful global exchange.

#### 4 Approaches to cultural promotion

In the process of language dissemination, integrating cultural elements—such as those embedded in Chinese characters and vocabulary—enables learners to develop a deeper understanding of linguistic usage in context, transforming abstract linguistic symbols into vivid, culturally meaningful representations. To effectively guide learners in daily communication, the cultural knowledge imparted should emphasize interest and practicality.

- "士为知己者死" (A scholar will die for one who understands him);
- "不求同日生, 只愿同日死" (Not seeking to be born on the same day, but willing to die together);
- "在家靠父母, 出外靠朋友" (At home, rely on parents; abroad, rely on friends).

Such comparisons illuminate cultural nuances, fostering learners' ability to navigate sociolinguistic contexts appropriately. Beyond classroom instruction, cultural acquisition thrives in immersive settings. Learners should be encouraged to engage with local communities through activities like public transportation, shopping, attending films or theater performances, social gatherings, museum visits, and travel. These experiences allow organic exposure to Chinese customs and values.

However, in overseas Chinese language education, the lack of a natural linguistic environment poses a challenge. Thus, creating simulated cultural spaces becomes essential. Strategies include:

- Classroom Design: Decorating with traditional artifacts (e.g., paper-cuttings, Chinese knots) and providing culturally specific games (e.g., Chinese chess, shuttlecock kicking).
- Multimedia Integration: Playing Chinese music or showcasing festival customs via visuals (e.g., Lunar New Year traditions).
- Interactive Activities: Establishing language corners, organizing cultural competitions, or hosting themed events (e.g., Mid-Autumn Festival celebrations).

By situating culture within tangible scenarios—whether through role-playing market haggling or rehearsing tea ceremony etiquette—learners absorb cultural knowledge experientially, bridging the gap between abstract concepts and real-world application.

#### 5 Conclusion: The imperative of cultural integration in teaching Chinese as a foreign language

In the dissemination of Chinese as a foreign language, the consistent incorporation of cultural elements is not merely beneficial but essential - both for effective language acquisition and for achieving successful cross-cultural communication. This approach necessitates that instructors of Chinese as a foreign language cultivate a profound understanding of traditional Chinese culture themselves. They must steadfastly maintain a dual-focused strategy that equally emphasizes linguistic instruction and cultural transmission, thereby transcending the role of mere language teachers to become genuine ambassadors of Chinese culture.

This paradigm shift requires educators to: Systematically integrate cultural components into language curricula; Develop specialized cultural literacy training programs for instructors; Create authentic cultural immersion experiences for learners; Design teaching materials that organically blend linguistic and cultural content.

By adopting this comprehensive approach, we can ensure that learners develop not only linguistic competence but also the cultural fluency necessary for meaningful engagement with Chinese speakers and society. The ultimate goal is to foster intercultural communicators who are as comfortable navigating cultural nuances as they are with grammatical structures, thereby achieving truly effective and appropriate communication in Chinese contexts.

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