

The Application of Local Folk Culture in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language in an Intercultural Context

-- Taking Shaanxi Folk Culture as an Example

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Abstract: The spread of folk culture in a cross-cultural perspective has been interested by more and more Chinese language learners. Folk culture embodies the ontological content of Chinese culture while also constrains the development of language, and these two are complementary to each other. At present, there are many studies on the meaning and value of folk culture in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, but there is little documents about the application of local folk culture, especially Shaanxi folk culture, in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, so this paper will discuss Shaanxi folk culture in teaching Chinese as a foreign language from the cross-cultural background, as well as the application of local folk culture in teaching Chinese as a foreign language and proposes relevant teaching strategies.

Keywords: Cross-culture; Folk Culture; Shaanxi Folk Culture; Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language.

1. Introduction

As more and more foreigners begin to learn Chinese, the teaching of Chinese knowledge and the penetration of Chinese culture have become the main tasks of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, among which the dissemination of culture is of great importance. Folk culture is one of the many connotations of Chinese culture, which is closely related to people's life and is a habit created, enjoyed and passed down by people of a nation or region. Also, Shaanxi folk culture reflects the customs and cultural characteristics of Shaanxi people's life. As the starting point of the Silk Road, Xi'an and its province Shaanxi have a strong attraction to learners of Chinese language, who want to know about Xi'an, starting from the dialect to the Terracotta Warriors and other cultural infiltration makes them interested in the local folk culture and customs of Shaanxi, thus increasing their confidence in learning Chinese. This paper will start from exploring the current situation of folk culture in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, analyze the application of Shaanxi folk culture in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, and finally propose strategies related to teaching folk culture in teaching Chinese as a foreign language.

2. The Current Situation of Folk Culture in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

In today's increasingly frequent cross-cultural communication, the spread of folk culture has received more and more extensive attention, and the teaching of folk culture has also received the attention of teachers of Chinese as a foreign language. Due to its diversity and complexity, it requires the joint efforts of teachers and Chinese learners in the process of transmission.

2.1. The Importance of Folk Culture

The cultural connotation of "different winds in a hundred miles and different customs in a thousand miles" is enough to explain the uniqueness of folk culture. As one of the four ancient civilizations, China has a rich and diverse culture with a long history. Besides, as the source of the development of China's traditional culture, folk culture has the function of enhancing national identity and strengthening national spirit, and its social, regional and normative characteristics have a profound influence on the inheritance and development of China's traditional culture.

Language carries culture, and the development of language cannot be separated from the inheritance of culture. Learners need to learn cultural knowledge while learning Chinese, and they should master cultural functions along with language skills. Therefore, language learners can learn Chinese ontology through folk culture and appreciate the profundity of Chinese culture.

In addition, folk culture, as a living culture closely related to people's lives, is the root of Chinese culture, and it carries and conveys the spirit of the Chinese nation. Through the understanding of folk culture, learners can better understand the character of Chinese people and better communicate with each other.

2.2. The Value of Folk Culture Communication in Cross-Cultural Background

With the improvement of China's international status, its comprehensive strength has been enhanced, and the cultural soft power has also been greatly improved. More and more foreigners are interested in China, and they begin to learn Chinese language and culture. Therefore, cross-cultural communication becomes an indispensable part in teaching Chinese as a foreign language.

Chinese learners need to take intercultural consciousness as a prerequisite when learning Chinese folk culture, respect the differences of different cultures, absorb and learn from the

excellent parts, and seek common ground while reserving differences. In addition to the dissemination of Chinese folk culture, it is also necessary to strengthen the learning of students' native culture, pay attention to the differences between different cultures, mobilize students' existing life experience through comparison, and thus stimulate their curiosity and desire to learn Chinese language and Chinese culture.

In the context of "One Belt, One Road", the countries along the route have started a "Chinese fever", and they learn Chinese for the sake of economic and trade exchanges, so that more people want to know China and Chinese people through folk culture. In order to understand Chinese language expressions and communicate better with Chinese people, they not only need to learn Chinese well, but also need to understand local customs and habits, which reflects the important value of folk culture in cross-cultural communication.

2.3. The Application of Folk Culture in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

The relationship between language and culture complements each other, and Chinese characters carry the connotation of folk culture. The origins of many Chinese characters are related to folk customs, and they reflect the daily life of the people, witnessing the wisdom and crystallization of ancient working people in the process of their development. In addition, the origin of some vocabulary words is also related to folk customs. Therefore, the teaching of folk culture has been widely used in the lesson of Chinese as a foreign language.

2.3.1. The Application of Folk Culture in Teaching Chinese Characters

The development of any language is inseparable from the cultivation of culture, and Chinese characters contain profound cultural connotations in the process of their development. Language is the carrier of folklore, and folklore is the root of language development. Therefore, in teaching Chinese characters to foreigners, we can apply cultural contents to them. For example, when teaching "dragon" and "phoenix", students should be told that dragon and phoenix have special meanings in China, representing nobility, good fortune, and luck and success. As a unique cultural accumulation of Chinese people, "dragon and phoenix" have been rooted in the heart of every Chinese person. Not only can the imprint of dragon and phoenix be seen in people's daily life, but also the aesthetic awareness of dragon and phoenix culture has penetrated into all corners of social life.

Furthermore, Chinese characters are like a difficult picture for some students whose native language is pinyin script, so when teaching Chinese characters, teachers can introduce the origin and evolution of Chinese characters and simplify the learning of Chinese characters by explaining to students the stories behind them. They can also introduce the different scripts with the help of calligraphy and let them appreciate the works of the great masters of the past generations to inspire them to learn Chinese characters, reduce the intimidation caused by the complexity and variety of Chinese characters, and let the learners feel that they can appreciate the charm of traditional Chinese culture by learning Chinese characters.

2.3.2. The Application of Folk Culture in Vocabulary Teaching

As the most active factor among the three elements of

language, vocabulary can reflect the folk customs of people's daily life. As the saying goes, a specific language vocabulary cannot be separated from a specific cultural environment, and the production of some vocabulary is closely related to folk customs. For example, "plum blossom" symbolizes perseverance and self-improvement in China, and "willow tree" is regarded as a symbol of good luck by ancient people because it has the function of healing diseases and driving away ghosts.

At the same time, there are also proverbs and sayings that can fully reflect the customs of people's daily life. The most important feature of these proverbs and sayings is that they are vivid and imaginative and can be used frequently in people's daily life. For example, when explaining "singing the red face" and "singing the white face", students should first know the origin of the expressions and know that they are related to Beijing opera, the national essence of China, and then let them know when to use the expressions. Therefore, it is important to incorporate as much folk culture as possible when explaining such colloquialisms, and to explore deeper into the cultural factors behind the language.

3. The Current Situation of Shaanxi Folk Culture in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

Shaanxi, as the ancient capital of the 13th dynasty and the starting point of the Silk Road, has rich folk culture resources, and many folk customs have been nurtured in its rich historical heritage. International students in Shaanxi can learn Chinese through the transmission of these folk cultures, and many teachers in foreign Chinese classrooms also use them in their classes.

3.1. The Significance of Integrating Shaanxi Folk Culture into Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

As the capital of the thirteen dynasties with a long history, Xi'an and its provinces and cities have extremely rich historical and cultural resources, and if these resources can be used in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, it will help attract more international students to come to Xi'an and learn Chinese.

The integration of local folk culture into foreign Chinese classrooms is conducive to improving students' efficiency in learning Chinese and reducing the phenomenon of cultural shock. Teachers introduce the folk culture of Shaanxi in the classroom and students are exposed to the people and environment of Shaanxi in their daily lives. In the long run, Chinese learners can improve their Chinese language proficiency and thus can better adapt to the local cultural environment and integrate into the local life as soon as possible.

3.2. The Application of Shaanxi Folk Culture in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

Shaanxi, as one of the birthplaces of the Chinese nation, is rich in historical and cultural resources. The folk culture of Shaanxi is closely related to the daily life of Shaanxi people, reflecting the briskness of Shaanxi people's character on the one hand and the characteristics of the local historical environment on the other. Shaanxi folk culture is used in all

aspects of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, among which this paper will specifically develop the following two aspects.

3.2.1. The Application of Shaanxi Dialect in Oral Chinese Teaching

Shaanxi dialect refers to the Guanzhong dialect in Shaanxi Province, which is the oldest dialect in China and was called “Yayan” in the Western Zhou Dynasty. According to research and analysis, the pronunciation of Guanzhong dialect is further than that of Mandarin, as follows: Guanzhong pronounces light when Mandarin pronounces yinping, Guanzhong still pronounces yangping when Mandarin pronounces yangping, Guanzhong pronounces devoiced when Mandarin pronounces uppercase, and Guanzhong pronounces yinping when Mandarin pronounces devoiced. For international students in Shaanxi, although they learn standard Mandarin, to some extent the people they come into contact with are often local people with dialect accents, and even some teachers carry the pronunciation characteristics of Guanzhong. Therefore, in order to help international students, improve their spoken Chinese and integrate into local life as soon as possible, teachers can teach some common and authentic expressions of Shaanxi dialect to motivate international students to speak Chinese.

3.2.2. The Application of Shaanxi Food Folklore in Chinese Cultural Teaching

Due to its unique geographical advantage, the greatest difference between the dietary characteristics of Shaanxi and other regions is its diversity and richness. From snacks like Rou Jiamo and Liang Pi to Yangrou Paomo, all of them have their historical allusions, which all reflect the local humanistic feelings in Shaanxi. For example, it is said that there is an incomprehensible relationship between Yangrou Paomo and Zhao Kuangyin, the founding emperor of Song Dynasty. At the end of the Fifth Dynasty, Zhao Kuangyin, who had not yet achieved his ambition, wandered in the streets of Chang’an, and asked a bakery for pie. The shopkeeper took pity on him and gave him two leftover pies, but the two burritos were hard and dry, so he couldn’t bite them, and then he asked for a bowl of mutton soup, soaking the pie to eat. A few years later, Zhao Kuangyin became the founding emperor, in an outing inspection happened to find a shopkeeper to break the pie and then poured mutton soup, plus a large piece of meat, after tasting he found very similar to the taste of the year. Overnight, the emperor came to eat that and the news spread in the whole Chang’an city, and over time, the food Zhao Kuangyin ate became the most popular snack in Chang’an city passed down to this day named Yangrou Paomo.

As we can see, international students can learn about the history and humanity of Shaanxi while tasting the food in Shaanxi. By introducing the origin of the food, teachers can not only let international students understand the local food habits, but also learn a lot about folk culture to help them integrate into local life.

4. Teaching Strategies of Local Folk Culture in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

Local folk culture has rich and practical characteristics, and its dissemination process requires targeted arrangement of teaching materials. In addition, teachers should use teachers’ language in the foreign Chinese class to skillfully link Chinese language knowledge with folk culture, and also take

into account the cultural contents of foreign students’ countries. Then it will discuss the teaching strategies of local folk culture in teaching Chinese as a foreign language from the perspective of teaching contents and teaching method.

4.1. Teaching Content of Local Folk Culture in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

As an important form of China’s cultural export, local folk culture can be fully utilized in teaching Chinese as a foreign language to help international students understand the language expressions and styles of different regions, which is conducive to better communication with local people. Therefore, in the classroom of Chinese as a foreign language, not only can teachers explain the folk culture in the language, but also carry out related teaching activities with Chinese folk culture as the theme.

Take Shaanxi folklore as an example, many folk customs are widely spread, among which Shaanxi dialect, Shaanxi tourism folklore, Shaanxi food folklore and Shaanxi folk art attract the strong interest of international students, which makes international students from all over the world have a strong desire to learn the local folklore culture in Shaanxi. Teachers can start a series of cultural experience activities in the classroom, including Shaanxi dialect, Shaanxi food and paper-cutting, to help international students learn Chinese and understand the local cultural characteristics of Shaanxi at the same time. By taking international students on field trips and experiencing folklore activities, they can deepen their understanding of Chinese folk culture and motivate them to learn Chinese.

Furthermore, teachers should infuse folk culture into the specific language teaching, and use folk culture to explain the language. The vocabulary of “Qin opera”, “social fire” and “Yangge” are difficult for international students to understand. For example, when explaining the word “social fire”, students will be confused if they only explain the literal meaning. Teachers should tell students that is a kind of spectacular mass entertainment in Shaanxi folklore, which comes from the ancient worship of land and fire, and let students watch related videos to understand it.

4.2. Teaching Methods of Local Folk Culture in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

Teachers need to design different types of Chinese language courses according to the actual situation, and the teaching materials about Chinese folk culture need to be arranged by teachers in a reasonable way. However, because there are few teaching materials about folk culture, the teaching of folk culture has not been given enough attention in the Chinese as a foreign language classroom. In view of the above problems, several suggestions are proposed.

Firstly, teachers should have systematic knowledge of folk culture. Only with sufficient theoretical knowledge and rich teaching experience can they be able to spread Chinese culture in front of international students in a targeted way. Therefore, teachers can be provided with relevant training courses, and reasonable teaching programs can be designed for different types of courses. Teachers should also make their own teaching materials about folk culture and arrange folk culture experience activities in a targeted way from local folk culture.

Secondly, teachers should pay attention to the mutual integration of language and culture. Since language and

culture complement each other, teachers should integrate the content of folk culture when teaching language ontology, so as to better understand the language points through the penetration of folk culture and create a good atmosphere for students to learn the target language.

Finally, teachers should focus on learners' experience of folk culture. Besides the learning of language ontology, what international students want to know more is the knowledge of Chinese culture. Therefore, teachers should set up a series of folklore experience courses from students' interests and let international students participate in them. Take Shaanxi folklore as an example, teachers can offer activities related to Shaanxi food and folklore, and lead international students to taste Shaanxi snacks to understand Shaanxi food habits.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of Chinese learners learning Chinese is not only the acquisition of language knowledge, but also the acquisition of cultural knowledge. As one of the important expressions of China's traditional culture, folk culture plays an essential role in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. Therefore, this paper explores the application of local folk culture in teaching Chinese as a foreign language from a cross-cultural perspective, taking Shaanxi folk culture as an example, and proposes relevant teaching strategies for the integration of local folk culture into the foreign Chinese classroom. Eventually, in the hope that this article can be helpful for the research about folk culture in teaching Chinese as a foreign language.

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