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RESEARCH ON CHINESE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF «HUI CULTURE»

Abstract. This study explores the Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) class in Anhui University and folk culture teaching in CFL class. Using the ethnological approach as a guiding framework, the data analysis of this study is unpacked through eight workshops that teachers designed and interview reflections of international students, for the propos of exploring the unique processes of incorporating folk culture teaching into cross-culture communication. This study has filled in multiple research gaps by being one of the first to look at folk culture in Chinese language teaching through a students-focused investigation and by its interdisciplinary research method. It has also included a more balanced focus on both reading and speaking projects which responds to the linguistic features of the Chinese language.

Key-words: international students class of Chinese as a foreign language intercultural communication.

With the enhancement of China's economic strength and the implementation of the "the Belt and Road" policy, more and more international students come to China to study, work and live. The Chinese class has gradually shifted from the initial emphasis on language teaching to the current balance between language and culture. The folk culture, as an important perspective of Chinese civilization, greatly enrich the cross-cultural language corpus. Anhui Province studied in the present research, is one of the important birthplaces of Chinese civilization. Over the past dynasties, celebrities have emerged in large numbers, forming the Hui culture school with Anhui regional characteristics. The most representative aspects of Chinese culture include Hui merchants who adhere to the business principle of "integrity", Hui cuisine which is considered as one of the most famous Chinese culinary arts, Huangmei Opera, known for its lively and expressive style, Hui family concept and Hui education system. These cultural heritages with deep regional characteristics are the social and cultural driving force that not only serves as an important business card for Anhui province to enter the international community, but also attracts international students for higher education.

This study aims to conduct a cross-cultural investigation on the basis of ethnographic exploration and to introduce the folk culture of Hui to CFL class. From the perspective of teaching content, we want to know if incorporating Hui culture into teaching Chinese as a foreign language can enhance the interest of

international students in learning Chinese, improve their motivation of language learning and increase their cross-cultural adaptation level.

Ethnographic approach in intercultural communication research

Ethnologists, who act as observers, carry out analyzes "[...] grounded in a commitment to the first-hand experience and exploration of a particular social or cultural setting on the basis of (though not exclusively by) participant observation" [1]. They favor an epistemological logic which serves as a methodological basis for studying the microsystems within which there are factors likely to be reproduced. By adopting ethnographic approach, they "scrutinize the process more than the result" [2] and identify the revealing aspects of the subject of analysis deeply rooted in the field. In addition to helping ethnologists to obtain answers in an exploratory way, ethnographic approach also allows new ideas to emerge and focus on different forms such as literature and drama. Descriptive and inductive, this approach enhances the value and potential of learners' cross-cultural awareness, enable learners to deeply explore human experience and to develop their intercultural awareness and ability.

In the present research, teachers lead participants to experience and perceive specific habits and customs in the form of literature by reading extracts from folktale or literary texts about Anhui province and Hui culture. Participants can comment on the stories by reading aloud and sharing their interpretation, knowledge and experience, which build a composite cultural identity for them. The social life content, geographical environment, psychological characteristics and aesthetic intentions are reflected in the form of literary creation, and the observation and evaluation of the social life are reflected by the creative subject of literature.

The adoption of ethnographic approach in the present research enables students with different cultural backgrounds to carry out in-depth discussions on cultural differences and makes it possible for students of different countries to view problems from intercultural perspectives and actively avoid cultural conflict.

Applied methods and theory

To highlight complex and changing phenomena and to capture data that are authentic and representative, focus groups method is selected in this research. Through observations of the group member's dynamic, their answers to questions and even their movements, researchers explore the feedback through which respondents will express their understanding in their own terms.

This study used Grounded theory to guide content analysis. Qualitative research has long been "not systematic enough, the relationship between theory and

method is ambiguous, methodology and research technology are disconnected" [4], while Grounded theory has given corresponding solutions. Grounded theory codes the empirical materials mainly based on interviews. When collecting empirical materials, it mainly uses in-depth interviews and participatory observation methods to refine theoretical concepts and process the data level by level. Coding is the core of Grounded theory analysis. Grounded theory allow researchers to continuously make reasonable and scientific judgments during the whole process by using theoretical sampling and cross comparisons from external sources such as literature and daily experience to derive research results [3].

In this study, eight international students of Anhui University were interviewed. They come from six different countries (African and Middle East countries) and study in different programs in Anhui University. From November 2021 to May 2022, eight interviews about different themes were completed on the campus, by using focus group interview method. Each lasted about two hours. The main themes included Hui families, Hui festivals, Hui taboos, Huangmei Opera, Hui beliefs, Hui food, Hui merchant and Hui education system. The eight international students engaged in collective discussions and interactions, forming a free and equal space for communication which enabled them to eliminate concerns about their different identity, cultural background and to participate with a more open mindset.

Analysis

The present research analyzed the interview content of international students and revealed the interaction between international students and the Hui folk culture. Through a students-focused investigation and by its interdisciplinary research method, this part examine in depth the unique processes of incorporating folk culture teaching into cross-culture communication. Although the discussion behavior of international students is mediated by symbols such as literary works and folktales, analyzing these symbols only at the content level is not enough. They should also be returned to the context in which they take root in in order to understand and perceive the production process of the symbols, and further understand the cultural significance within them. Only a deep understanding of the situation behind the symbols can researchers objectively and comprehensively grasp the thinking of foreign students, understand their behavior as a whole.

The success of cultural exchange between international students and the Chinese society largely depends on the adaptability of cross-cultural communication. The commonalities in human culture exert a positive influence and play a driving role in the cross-cultural communication itself. When studying the theme

of "Huangmei Opera", the teacher talked about its origin – the folk songs sung by tea picking villagers. From historical and culture perspective, some students resonated with war songs and labor songs of their country and their evolution. When studying the theme of "The Faith of Hui People", one student proposed to compare the veneration of ancestors in Hui culture with the story of praying for rain from God in the Bible, and she talked about the similar meaning of belief in different cultures. When learning the theme of "Hui taboos", several international students have expressed that they would not believe or follow some overly ancient taboos. But they admitted that some taboos represented the traditional cultural habits of Chinese people and they would respect them. In addition, some values that highlight Hui culture such as filial piety towards parents, respecting teachers and valuing education have also deeply resonated with the learning and life characteristics of international students. And the fact that Hui merchants who were willing to help others, unite their neighbors and give back to society and who had great achievements in Chinese history has changed students' understanding of “merchants”.

Conclusion:

This study conducted a cross-cultural investigation on the basis of ethnographic exploration and introduced the folk culture of Hui to CFL class. Literary works have become a treasure trove full of cultural significance, inside of which the social life content, geographical environment, customs and habits, psychological characteristics and aesthetic intentions of Hui culture were reflected.

Eight workshops with literary extracts provided international students with first-hand reference materials for cross-cultural experiences. By introducing literary works of cultural significance into CFL class, participants commented on the stories by reading aloud and sharing their interpretation, knowledge and experience, improved their Chinese reading and speaking capacity, enhanced their identification with Hui folklore and built a composite cultural identity for them.

From the perspective of developing cross-cultural communication skills, literary texts as a cultural symbol, create a free and open mindset space for the communication. By reading and discussing, international students constantly accumulate and revise new and old cultural experience, generate new sights and gradually form a new "cultural schema" between the home country and Anhui province. Cultural shock, ethnocentrism and language barriers are diminished, cultural communication starts from an open and inclusive intercultural mentality, intercultural adaptability and critical attitude.

References

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