

Application of Sichuan Regional Culture in Improving the Quality and Efficiency of Education for International Students in China

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Abstract. As the scale of international students continues to expand, the education for international students in China is moving towards higher levels. This article aims to explore the application of Sichuan regional culture in enhancing the quality and efficiency of education for international students in China. It analyzes the importance of regional culture and proposes strategies like incorporating language cultural elements Sichuan dialect and Sichuan opera, as well as non-language aspects Sichuan cuisine and university characteristics, into the curriculum. It also suggests increasing the proportion of cultural courses, introducing cultural experiential courses, and optimizing the management of international students. The goal is to provide new perspectives and references for improving the quality and effectiveness of education for international students in China and to offer insights for the integration and development of language communication and cultural exchange.

Keywords: Regional culture; education for international students in China; improving quality and efficiency.

1. Introduction

With the development of China's educational opening-up efforts and the implementation of the "Belt and Road" cooperation initiative, the scale of international students coming to China continues to expand. The education for international students in China is moving towards higher levels and higher quality. In 2018, the Ministry of Education of China issued the "Higher Education Quality Specifications for International Students in China (Trial)" (hereinafter referred to as the "Specifications"), which set cultivation goals in terms of discipline and professional level, understanding and comprehension of China, language proficiency, cross-cultural and global competence. In 2020, the "Opinions of the Ministry of Education and Eight Other Departments on Accelerating and Expanding the Opening-up of Education in the New Era" was issued, which made key deployments for the opening-up of education, emphasizing the coordination of internal and external efforts, improvement of quality and efficiency, and proactive leadership.

Regional culture, as a part of Chinese culture, is a unique cultural integration with a specific regional environment. International students will have daily communication and interaction with local residents, and understanding the regional culture of their host city can accelerate their cultural adaptation, promote cultural identity, and improve the quality of language teaching and professional learning for international students.

Sichuan, known as the "Land of Abundance," is renowned for its hospitable and inclusive attitude. Sichuan Province has attached great importance to the education of international students, issuing a series of policies such as the "Implementation Opinions on Enhancing the Opening-up of Education in the New Era" and the "Sichuan Province Action Plan for Promoting Education Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative," to create the "Study in Sichuan" brand and encourage outstanding international students to study and engage in research in Sichuan.

This article aims to explore the importance and selection and strategies of regional cultural content in the education of international students in China. The goal is to provide new perspectives and references for improving the quality and effectiveness of education and to contribute to the integration and development of language communication and cultural acculturation.

2. The Importance of Regional Culture in Education for International Students in China

Social factors have a significant impact on second language learning. In order to improve the quality of education, it is important to "help learners overcome language and cultural shock as quickly as possible, enhance language boundary permeability, and reduce the social distance between learners and native speakers of the target language" [1].

Different regions have their own unique cultural traditions. In cultivating international students' understanding of China and their cross-cultural and global competence, regional culture plays a crucial role. International students coming to China need to adapt to the local environment. As Xianlin Ji said, "Without involving the history, culture, and social customs of a country, the language cannot be learned well." This illustrates the inseparable connection between language and culture [2].

2.1 Easing Communication Anxiety and Reducing Cultural Impact

The native cultures of international students often differ significantly from Chinese culture. Many students may experience psychological, physiological, and behavioral contrasts, discomfort, or a sense of loss of control when they feel the differences with their own culture. If these differences are not adequately explained and addressed, they can lead to increased anxiety and cultural conflicts among international students. Timely introduction of regional culture can help students become familiar with and understand the local environment, culture, and customs, which is essential for easing communication anxiety and reducing the cultural impact on international students.

2.2 Reducing Social Distance with Native Speakers

International students may tend to form close-knit groups and only interact with other international students. These separate social circles, lead to a distant relationship with and "intrinsic barrier" between international students and local people [3]. Due to cultural differences and unfamiliarity with local culture, the interaction and emotional connection between the international students and the local people become weak, hindering their adaptation to the new environment. The introduction of regional culture can accelerate the adaptation process for international students, increase interpersonal interaction, and shorten the social and psychological distance between international students and native speakers, facilitating their cross-cultural adaptation.

2.3 Inspiring Motivation for Chinese Language Learning

"Familiarizing learners with the target language culture can stimulate learners' motivation for language learning" [4]. Understanding the target language culture gives international students more confidence and reduces misunderstandings during communication. Successful communication reduces students' frustration in learning and living in China and enhances their sense of self-worth, providing motivation for further Chinese language and professional study.

3. Teaching Content of Sichuan Regional Culture in Education for International Students in China

Sichuan regional language culture includes dialects and Sichuan opera, while the non-language culture comprises Sichuan cuisine and the host university characteristics.

3.1 Language Culture - Dialects

Dialects are regional variants of a language used as a means of communication in specific locations or regions [5]. Taking Sichuan as an example, the predominant form of communication in daily life is Sichuan dialect, commonly known as Sichuahua. This poses certain challenges for international students learning Chinese, as they are primarily exposed to Standard Mandarin in their classes, but the surrounding environment, especially in sectors like clothing, food, housing, and transportation,

involves communication in Sichuan dialect. This mismatch between classroom learning and practical usage might hinder students' ability to apply their language skills and may even lead to a negative attitude towards learning Chinese.

Currently, many scholars suggest teaching dialects in appropriate contexts, considering Standard Mandarin as the primary classroom language, while treating dialect learning as supplementary education. This approach enhances students' overall understanding of Chinese and fosters better interaction with local communities, thereby improving their daily communication skills and cultural identity [6,7].

Learning Sichuan dialect opens a gateway for international students to explore the local culture. Teaching basic dialects can: 1) strengthen communication and connections with local residents, enhancing students' adaptability and Chinese language proficiency, enabling them to integrate better into the local community and culture. 2) Facilitate cultural understanding, as dialects reflect the essence of local culture. 3) Enhance language skills: Learning Sichuan dialect can improve international students' language abilities, enriching their linguistic repertoire.

3.2 Language Culture - Sichuan Opera

Sichuan Opera, one of the main traditional Chinese opera genres, is developed based on Sichuan dialect and is known for its distinct Sichuan characteristics, making it an essential part of the cultural heritage in the Bashu region. On May 20, 2006, Sichuan Opera was officially recognized and included in the first batch of China's National Intangible Cultural Heritage list by the State Council. Sichuan Opera's performance techniques, such as "Bian Lian" (face-changing), "Tu Huo" (spitting fire), "Shui Xiu" (water sleeves), and "Chang Xiu" (long sleeves), have captivated audiences both domestically and overseas, receiving widespread acclaim.

Incorporating activities and performances related to Sichuan Opera can be an effective way to introduce and immerse students in this unique art form. Through interactive sessions and practical training, international students can learn and mimic certain segments of Sichuan Opera. Additionally, organizing extracurricular field trips to Sichuan Opera theaters or museums will provide students with an authentic experience, allowing them to gain insights into Sichuan Opera's culture and deeply appreciate the customs and regional traditions of Sichuan.

3.3 Non-Language Culture - Sichuan Cuisine

Food culture is one of the factors that attract international students to come to China. Sichuan cuisine, one of the four major Chinese culinary styles, is renowned with the saying "China has food, Sichuan has flavor." Sichuan cuisine has evolved and developed over various historical periods, reflecting the integration of material, spiritual, and linguistic aspects with culture [8]. Hotpot is one of its representative dishes. When international students come to China, they inevitably encounter local cuisine on a daily basis. In the teaching process, showcasing Sichuan's dining culture to international students enhances their appreciation for the local culinary traditions, better understanding of the cultural concepts in the region, and sparks their interest in learning the Chinese language. The introduction of Sichuan cuisine culture is beneficial in enriching international students' knowledge of Chinese culture and improving their cross-cultural communication skills.

3.3 Non-Language Culture - University Characteristics and Culture

Providing international students with information about the characteristics and culture of their respective universities, can help them understand its traditions and cultural context. This facilitates their integration into the university environment and cultivates a sense of belonging and identity with the university. Additionally, gaining insights into the academic strengths and teaching features of the university enables international students to make more targeted choices of courses and majors, thus enhancing their academic abilities.

The university where the author is located is Chengdu University of Information Technology, formerly known as Chengdu Institute of Meteorology, with the motto "Achieving Excellence in the

Atmosphere, Spreading Integrity Across the World." Explaining the university's history and the values embodied in the motto can inspire students' academic enthusiasm and sense of social responsibility.

4. Teaching Strategies for Sichuan Regional Culture

Cultural adaptation significantly influences second language learning. According to Oberg's cultural adaptation theory, international students go through four stages of cultural adaptation, namely honeymoon, crisis, adjustment, and biculturalism [9]. The adaptation process varies from person to person, with some students progressing faster while others may face greater challenges. To promote cultural adaptation and shorten the crisis period, optimization of international student management and curriculum teaching is essential.

4.1 Increase the Proportion of Cultural Courses in Curriculum Design

The educational goals include not only Chinese language proficiency and academic expertise but also an understanding of China's national conditions and cross-cultural competence. In addition to language courses and professional classes, curriculum should incorporate courses related to Chinese culture and its history, geography, political system, core values, etc. Regional culture, such as Sichuan culture, can be included in these courses. For newcomers, an "Experience Sichuan Culture Week" could be organized before the start of regular classes. Through educational videos on local customs, natural features, history, geography, and living environment, students can alleviate their nervousness and unfamiliarity with the new environment, laying the foundation for a smooth transition to language acquisition. In the intermediate to advanced stages, courses like "Introduction to Sichuan Dialect," "Comparison of Standard Mandarin and Sichuan Dialect," and "Sichuan Folk Customs and Culture" could be offered through lectures, discussions, and face-to-face exchanges with local Chinese people, enriching the students' knowledge of Sichuan regional culture and providing a clear understanding of the Chinese cultural system [10]. This knowledge reservoir prepares them for successful communication with the locals outside of class.

4.2 Introduce Cultural Experience and Practical Courses

In addition to increasing the proportion of cultural courses in theoretical teaching, hands-on experiences are essential for a deeper understanding of regional culture. The "in-class + extracurricular" complementary approach to language and cultural teaching should be established. Planned experiential activities can be organized, such as calligraphy, Tai Chi, paper cutting, local family visits, Sichuan opera performances, Sichuan brocade weaving experiences, ethnic minority settlements visits, and local scenic spots. These activities help foster the international students' understanding and appreciation of Sichuan regional culture, while also enhancing their cross-cultural communication and social integration abilities, promoting the deeper development of international education and cultural exchange.

4.3 Optimize the Management of International Students

It is essential to shift from a management-centered approach to a student-centered model and establish student-oriented development. The "Regulations" require higher education institutions to establish a comprehensive management system for international students, gradually achieving convergence management of domestic and international students. Achieving such convergence should start from a cultural identity perspective and guide international students to face and understand cultural differences properly [11]. Administrative staff and students should respect cultural diversity, embrace the concept of "beauty in diversity," and promote harmonious coexistence. By establishing mentorship programs, support networks for international students like cultural clubs, language partners, frequent interaction between international students and Chinese students can facilitate cross-cultural adaptation.

5. Summary

Language is an integral part of culture, and culture is likewise an integral part of language. Sichuan regional culture provides the earliest and most significant context for international students studying in Sichuan, China. By extending Chinese language learning beyond the classroom and exposing students to multiple facets of the target language environment, we can alleviate communication anxiety, reduce cultural shocks, bridge the social distance between international students and native speakers, and stimulate their motivation for learning Chinese. Thus, enhancing the quality and effectiveness of international student education in China can be achieved. Further researches like the long-term effects of regional cultural education on international students' post-study experiences, such as their career development, professional interactions, and continued interest in Chinese language and culture after returning to their home countries can be conducted in the future.

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