

Insights from 'The Informal Talks' on Chinese Culture Teaching through the 5W Model"

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Abstract

To promote the dissemination of traditional Chinese culture, a large number of cultural and knowledge-based variety shows emerged starting in 2013. However, there are not many that truly belong to the category of intercultural programs, and "Informal Talks" is one of them. This paper conducts a systematic analysis of the communicative elements of "The Informal Talks" to explore content that can be referenced, with the aim of applying these insights to the practice of Chinese culture teaching, thereby advancing the development of Chinese international education and facilitating China's better integration into the world.

Keywords

Informal Talks, The communication mode, Culture teaching, International Chinese Education.

1. Introduction

Since the 21st century, globalization has progressed, leading to increased interaction and clash between different cultures. Chinese learners now seek more than just language skills; they are increasingly interested in learning about Chinese culture. In 2015, "Informal Talks," a cross-cultural program, gained public attention. Its unique format and guest lineup captured the interest of young audiences. It covers a wide range of topics related to social life. This provides new references for Chinese teachers in cultural education.

In recent years, research on cultural education has grown significantly, covering diverse areas. The main points can be categorized as follows: The first category focuses on teaching methods for specific cultural content. Huang Xiaojuan (2024) studied the value of Hanfu culture in Chinese culture and its teaching practices in international education. The second category analyzes the current state of cultural teaching in specific regions. Bai Yu (2019) investigated the role of "Informal Talks" in Kyrgyz spoken Chinese courses. Liu Sicheng (2022) explored the use of Douyin short videos in cultural education in Belarus, highlighting the importance of new technology. The third category examines the integration of culture into teaching. Li Xuesong (2024) looked at how to incorporate the cultural characteristics of the Bashu area into Chinese teaching for international students in Chongqing.

The above literature highlights the application of new media and technologies in Chinese language teaching. Wang Ke (2023) conducted a survey and interviews to study the use of teaching resources by teachers in beginner Chinese classrooms. The research confirmed that video resources are a crucial avenue for promoting Chinese internationally. Furthermore, their effective use is a key focus for many Chinese language teachers.

Since 2013, cultural variety shows have rapidly evolved, especially after "Informal Talks" launched in 2015. This show attracted research focused on its innovative format.

With the "Belt and Road" initiative, studies now emphasize cross-cultural communication and Chinese international education. Key areas include: First, research on errors by guests. Li

Yongjian (2024) analyzed prepositional errors by advanced learners. Zhang Gaohun (2019) studied conversational errors among Chinese international students using "Informal Talks." Second, Liao Keyin (2023) examined the program's success in cross-cultural communication. Third, there is a focus on format innovation. The show invites students from 11 countries to discuss youth-related topics. This promotes cultural exchange and enhances cross-cultural communication. Wang Yanhui (2017) analyzed the communication format to provide future references. Guo Yihan (2024) looked at the program's content, process, communication, and hosting, highlighting its success and innovative methods.

Current research mainly focuses on the innovation and communication effects of "Informal Talks." There is little content on how the show's communication format impacts Chinese language teaching. Most studies center on language education, with no attention to its role in cultural teaching.

This paper uses a survey to find issues in Chinese cultural education. It analyzes the "Informal Talks" show with the 5W model to identify factors of success. We will look at how the show's communication model fits with Chinese international education and cultural teaching to find useful elements. Finally, based on survey responses and the show's successes, we will suggest strategies using the 5W model. These insights aim to support the development and spread of Chinese culture.

2. Current Status and Analysis of Cultural Teaching

2.1. Survey Questionnaire

2.1.1. Purpose of the Survey

This article uses a survey method. Questionnaires were distributed to Chinese language teachers and volunteers in different regions. By looking at their experiences and understanding of Chinese cultural teaching, the results were analyzed. The article summarizes the current state of Chinese cultural education and identifies existing problems.

2.1.2. Survey Content

The survey questionnaires consists of a total of fifteen questions, focusing on the following areas: First, understanding the basic information of Chinese language teachers and volunteers, including gender, teaching region (location), and teaching duration (Questions 1 to 3).Second, questions about the teaching audience (Questions 4).Third, a series of questions related to cultural teaching (Questions 5 to 15).

2.2. Analysis of Survey Results.

2.2.1. Basic Information about Chinese Language Teachers

question1: gender.

Table 1. Gender Statistics of Chinese Language Teachers

gender	subtotal	rate
man	4	10%
woman	36	90%

question2: Regions Where Chinese Language Teachers Are Engaged in Teaching.

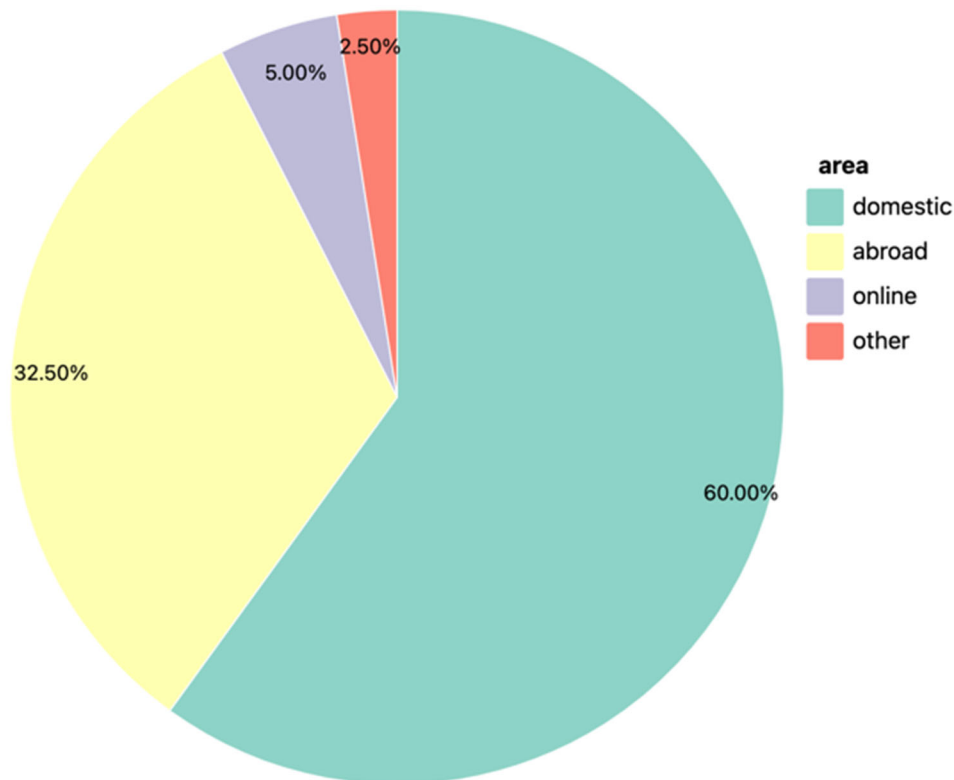


Figure 1. Statistics Chart of the Teaching Regions of Chinese Language Teachers.

question3: Time Engaged in Chinese Language Teaching.

Table 2. Statistical Table of Years of Teaching Experience for Chinese Language Teachers

time	subtotal	rate
less than 3 months	2	5%
3 to 6 months	7	17.5%
6 months to 1 year	15	37.5%
1 to 2 years	10	25%
over 2 years	6	15%

The first three questions of the survey report focus on the basic profile of the respondents. The results show that most of the Chinese language teachers are female. The second and third questions reveal that their teaching experience varies, mainly concentrated in the 6 months to 2 years range. Additionally, 60% of the participants teach Chinese as a foreign language in China. The respondents come from various regions, including domestic, abroad, and online. Their teaching experience also differs, showing a diverse composition among the participants.

2.2.2. Basic Situation of the Teaching Objects

question4: Chinese Proficiency of Learners.

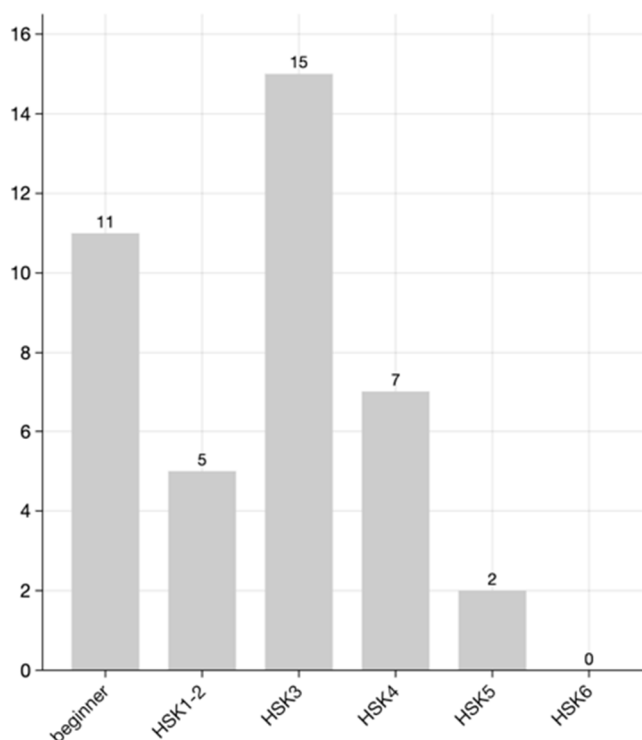


Figure 2. Statistical Chart of Learners' Chinese Proficiency

Based on the table above, most Chinese language volunteers and new Chinese teachers mainly teach students at the beginner level up to HSK Level 4. There is less focus on teaching at the advanced HSK levels.

2.2.3. Content Related to Cultural Teaching

question5: Does your school or class offer a separate Chinese culture course?

Table 3. Statistics on the Offering of Separate Chinese Culture Courses

option	subtotal	rate
TRUE	23	57.5%
FALSE	17	42.5%

The results of question five show that, despite the growing emphasis on cultural teaching in recent years, there are still few specialized cultural courses. Some regions do not offer separate cultural courses at all. Overall, cultural teaching is still considered a supplement to language instruction.

question6: Have you ever taught chinese culture before? (This includes integrated and speaking courses.)

Table 4. Statistics on Cultural Teaching by Chinese Language Teachers

option	subtotal	rate
TRUE	32	80%
FALSE	8	20%

Question six primarily classifies the survey participants. The results indicate that most of the teachers who participated in the survey have conducted cultural teaching. This shows that,

although specialized cultural teaching is lacking in some regions, cultural instruction has already been integrated into the foundational stage of language teaching.

question7: What topics do you think should be covered in Chinese cultural teaching?

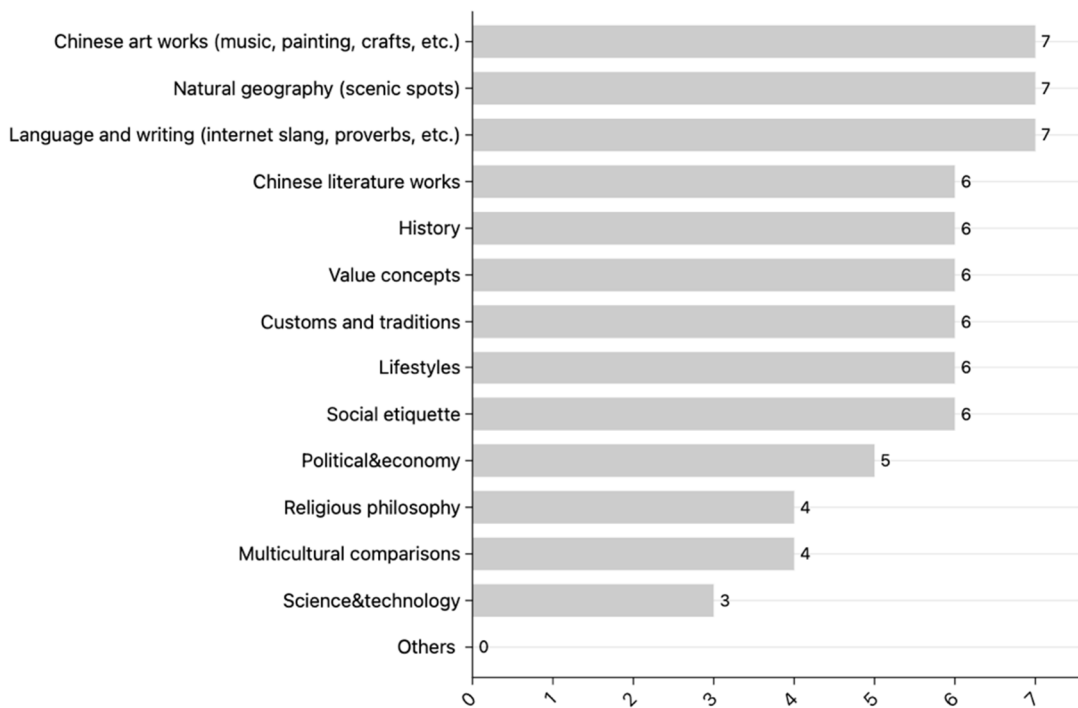


Figure 3. Statistical Chart of Teachers Who Have Not Taught Understanding of Cultural Teaching Content

This question focuses on survey subjects who have not conducted cultural teaching.

First, the results show that over half of the teachers think the topics mentioned—religious philosophy, comparisons between cultures, and science and technology—are unnecessary for cultural teaching.

Also, no content related to Chinese culture received unanimous approval from the participants. These points indicate that Chinese international teachers do not have a clear consensus on the content of cultural teaching. There are also no specific requirements within the teacher group regarding this content.

Question8: Do you have a clear teaching syllabus when conducting cultural teaching?

Table 5. Course Syllabus Status Statistics Table

option	subtotal	rate
TRUE	5	15.63%
FALSE	27	84.37%

From question eight, we can see that most Chinese language teachers do not have a clear syllabus for cultural teaching. This has resulted in a lack of consensus among teachers about the specific content of cultural instruction.

Question9: What methods do you use to assist your teaching when conducting cultural instruction?

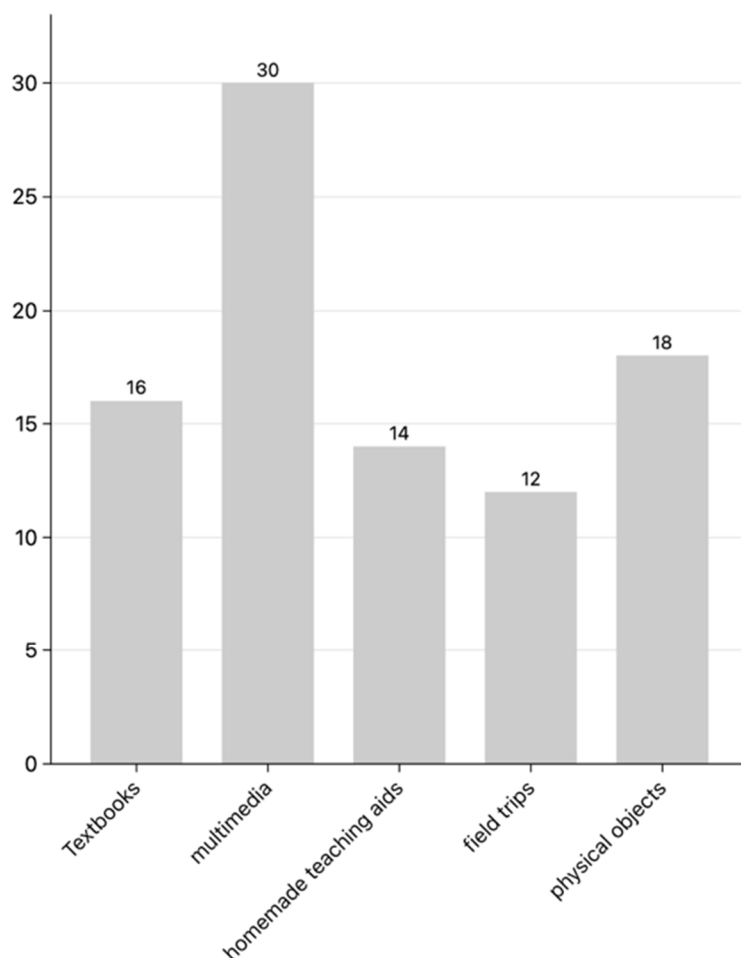


Figure 4. Statistics Chart of Tools for Cultural Instruction by Teachers

Question10: have you used clips from films or variety shows to assist your cultural instruction?

Table 6. Statistics Table of Using Film Clips in Teaching

option	subtotal	rate
TRUE	27	84.37%
FALSE	5	15.63%

n question ten, among the teachers who answered "no," all five said they would use clips from films or variety shows if conditions allow. This shows that the range of materials for teaching assistance is expanding. Traditional teaching methods are changing gradually.

Question11: If conditions permit, would you use clips from films and variety shows to assist your teaching?

This question targets the teachers who answered "no" in question eleven. All five teachers answered "yes" here. This shows that they value using clips from films and variety shows in teaching. Combining the results from question eleven, it is clear that using these video resources has become one of the most important methods in classroom instruction today.

Question12: What do you think about the effectiveness of using clips from films and variety shows to assist teaching?

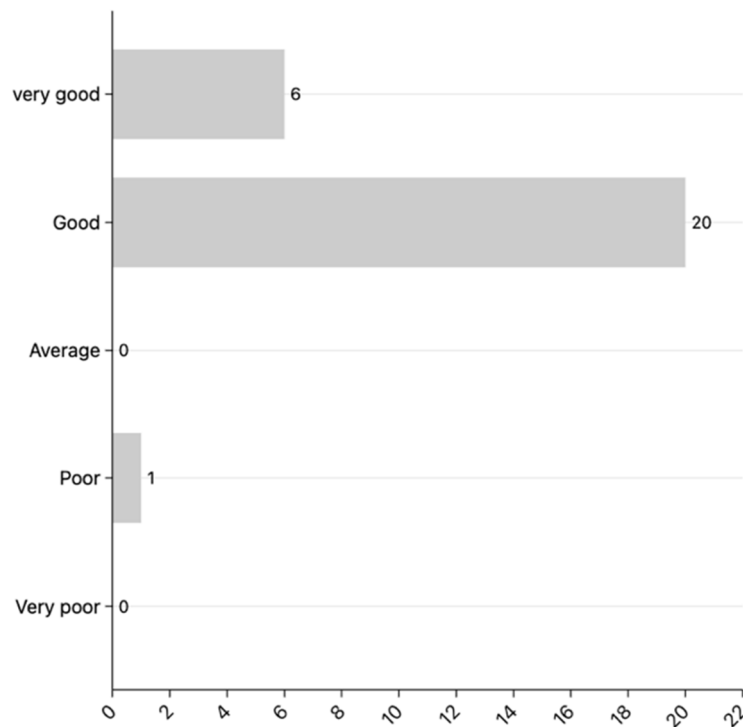


Figure 5. Statistics Chart of the Use of Film and Television Works in Teaching

From the above chart, we can see that most teachers report good results when using films or variety shows to assist with cultural instruction.

Question13: What aspects of Chinese cultural knowledge have you taught before?

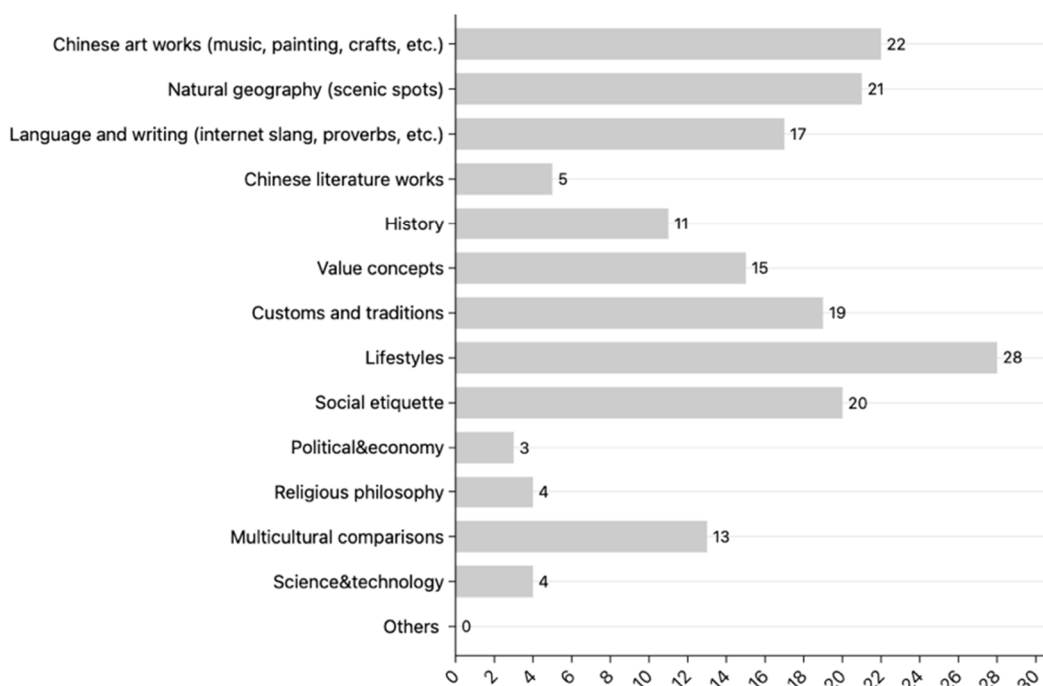


Figure 6. Statistics Chart of Cultural Teaching Content for Chinese Language Teachers

The chart shows that the cultural teaching content of the 32 teachers includes most aspects of Chinese culture. However, there is less focus on political economy, religious philosophy, science and technology, and literature.

Although the teachers cover a wide range of cultural topics, they concentrate mainly on six areas: lifestyle, social etiquette, and cultural aspects of language and writing. Artistic works, like calligraphy, paper-cutting, and opera, are strong representatives of Chinese culture. Most schools include these artistic activities in their cultural programs. Therefore, teachers often emphasize artistic works in their teaching.

In the HSK intermediate and advanced levels, some schools offer reading courses. These courses include some Chinese literary works. However, the teaching method mainly focuses on extensive reading, with low expectations for students' reading proficiency.

Question14: What is the exam method for dedicated cultural classes in your school or class?

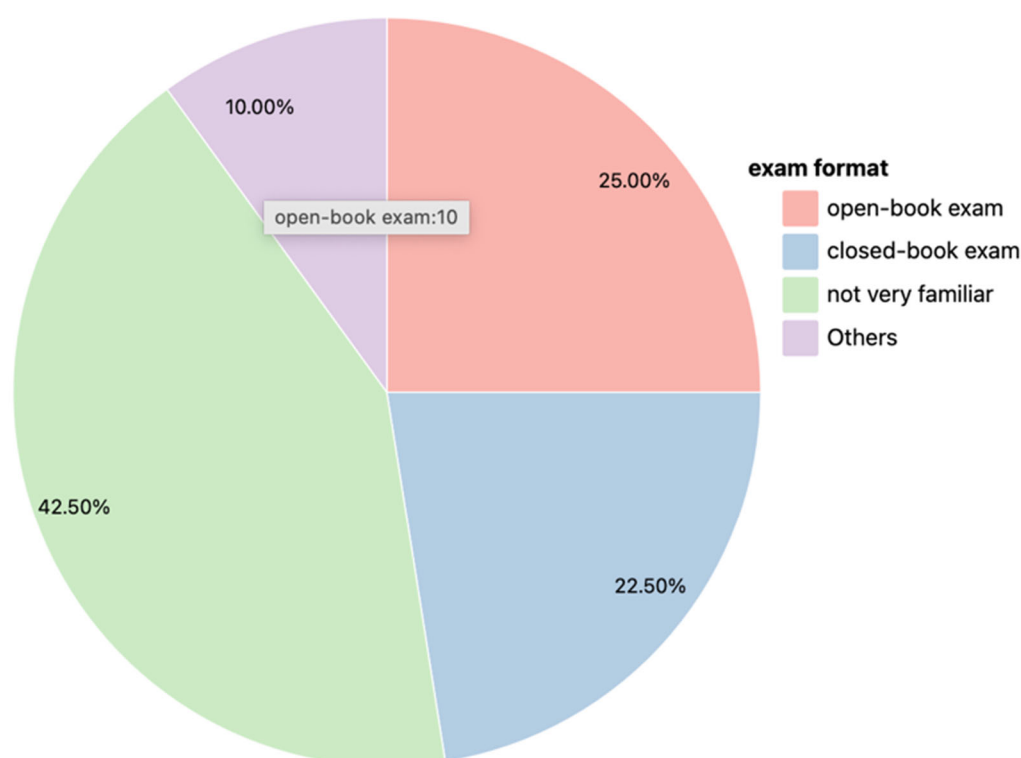


Figure 7. Statistics Chart of Assessment Methods for Specialized Cultural Courses

Table 6. Statistics Table of Using Film Clips in Teaching

No.	content
1	Cultural Presentation
2	class display
3	performance
4	No assessment

From the chart, it can be seen that 42.5% of teachers are not very familiar with the assessment methods for cultural courses. Most cultural courses use closed-book or open-book exams, while only a small number of courses are assessed through methods like cultural presentations.

Question15: What is the frequency of extracurricular cultural activities at your school (average number of activities per month)?

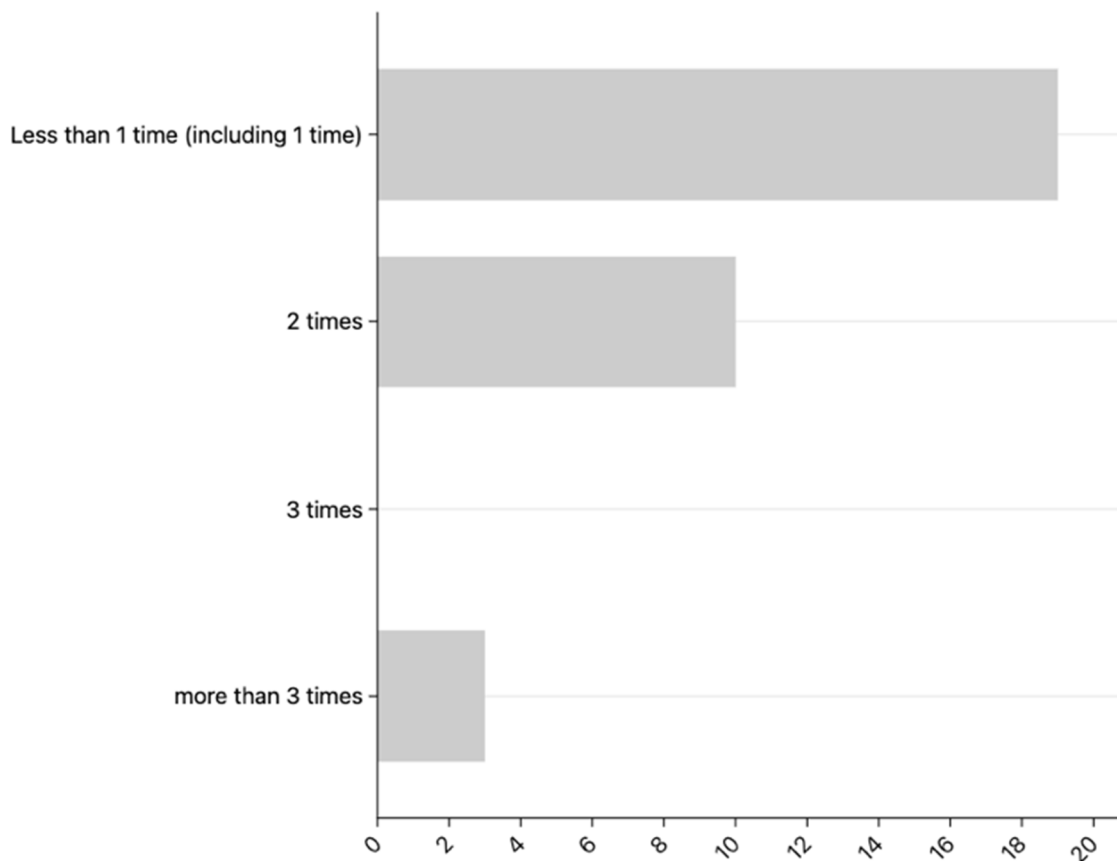


Figure 8. Statistics Chart of the Frequency of Cultural Activities in Different Schools

From the chart, most schools hold cultural activities 1-2 times a month. This is not very frequent. In summary, using the 5W model, teachers in Chinese international education have varying understandings of cultural courses. There is no systematic reference for the content of cultural teaching. Most teachers use multimedia methods for cultural education. However, the assessment mainly relies on written exams, which makes it a single format. The frequency of cultural activities is low, and student participation is limited.

Based on these points, we will analyze the program "Informal Talks" in five areas. We will also propose targeted strategies that can be referenced.

3. Analysis of the 5W Communication Model of 'The Informal Talks'

3.1. Sender

The main broadcasting platform for the first four seasons of the program is Hubei TV. However, Hubei TV has clear limitations. First, its audience is smaller than that of Hunan TV and CCTV. Additionally, the program targets a younger audience. This focus on young people affects viewership. The program received high ratings in its first season. However, it wasn't until later, when it aired online, that the number of viewers increased.

Starting from the fifth episode of the first season, the fixed cast of "Informal Talks" includes President Da Zuo, Vice President Ma Weiwei, Secretary General Yang Di, and Officer Chen Chao. Da Zuo and Yang Di are closer in age to the country representatives, helping them understand young people's thoughts better.

This host structure keeps the core of the program consistent. It also maintains its competitive edge over other talk shows through the integration of its hosts.

The guests are divided into two parts: a fixed group of ten youth representatives and a daily representative. Most of the eleven youth representatives are international students from top Chinese universities, with some being champions of the "Chinese Bridge" competition. They have strong cultural backgrounds that align with the program's themes.

The representatives come from both developed and developing countries, including Western and Eastern nations influenced by Confucian culture. Their diverse professions increase cultural variety and create more debate conflicts. This enhances the program's entertainment value and highlights its cross-cultural and global features.

3.2. Communication Content

Table 7. Program Segment Topic Statistics Table

content	Global Relativity	Proposal Debate
Gender Relations	7	23
Customs and Traditions	20	2
China	6	3
Social Phenomena	5	8
life	13	18
work	3	5
study	7	1
health	3	4
shopping	1	0
Personal Understanding	4	8
Self-growth	2	8
politics	3	2
history	11	1
entertainment	14	9
Diet or Food Culture	7	1
Transportation	3	0
Interpersonal Relationships	3	12
Distinctive Culture or Unique Culture	14	0
Technology	1	1
Clothing or Attire	1	0
Natural Geography	1	0
Social Etiquette	3	12

From Seasons 1 to 3 of "Informal Talks," the topics cover various cultural aspects. These include lifestyles, customs, social etiquette, political economy, historical culture, and natural geography of different countries. The program explores both basic cultural knowledge and specific social phenomena. For example, Season 1 discusses cyberbullying, while Season 2 addresses smartphone addiction.

Overall, "Informal Talks" features a wide range of topics. The content is youthful and relatable. It mainly targets young audiences, including international students in China and educators in Chinese language programs. This aligns well with the standards for selecting teaching materials.

3.3. Communication Medium

"Informal Talks" uses both traditional media and new media. New media offers stronger interactivity and better audience engagement compared to traditional media. During the broadcast, the production team shares program information and activities through official accounts on Weibo and Bilibili. This allows for interaction with the audience.

The bullet comment feature on Bilibili connects the audience with the guests and the program's official accounts. Additionally, representatives from various countries created Weibo accounts. This further increases interaction between the guests and the audience.

3.4. Audience

The audience of "Informal Talks" consists of three main groups. The first group includes ordinary viewers from Hubei TV and Bilibili. The second group is international students in China, attracted by the foreign youth guests of the program. The third group includes educators and students in Chinese language education.

3.5. Communication Effect

After gaining wide attention, "Informal Talks" attracted interest from many media outlets. It has been reported by media from Egypt, Russia, Italy, and other countries. The program has a large audience in South Asia and East Asia. Some Chinese language teachers use "Informal Talks" as a supplementary teaching tool.

4. Insights for Cultural Teaching in International Chinese Education

4.1. Insights for Chinese Language Teachers

In teaching Chinese language and culture, Chinese language teachers are ambassadors of Chinese culture. Analyzing "Informal Talks" shows essential qualities for cultural ambassadors. First, they should be approachable and inclusive. Second, their communication methods affect cultural transmission. Third, teachers should focus on improving their own cultural literacy.

4.2. Insights on Teaching Content

We can see that many topics in "Informal Talks" cover the following areas.

The first category is knowledge and culture. This includes literature, art, religious philosophy, natural geography, science and technology, history, and political and economic development.

The second category is communicative culture. This includes values, customs, lifestyles, social etiquette, and language.

Here, we present a summary of the cultural content from the five seasons of "Informal Talks" and its connection to cultural teaching. The statistics are shown in the table below:

In the chart above, we categorized the topics related to cultural elements from Seasons 1 to 5 of "Informal Talks," including skits, global cultural relativism, and debate proposals.

From the chart, we can see a few characteristics:

First, the three segments of "Informal Talks" cover nearly all cultural areas.

Second, the content related to communicative culture is much more than that of knowledge culture. The program focuses more on communication and the exchange of ideas among young representatives from different countries.

Table 8. "Informal Talks" Five Seasons: Cultural Content and Teaching Areas Statistics Table

Topic	Mini Sketch	Global Relativity	Proposal Debate
Knowledge and Culture			
Literary Works	Fable&Novel &Poetry&Myth		
Artistic Works	Song&Film and Television	Intangible Cultural Heritage &song	
Philosophy of Religion	Taoism		
Natural Geography		Disaster response	
Technology		Invention&manufacturing industry	
History		Major Events&World Records	
Political and Economic Development	News	Currency& Border& News& National Flag and Anthem& Identity Card& Capital& Service Industry& Policy	
others		Law&sports&Local Specialties	sports
Communicative Culture			
Values		Family Ethics& Cross- Cultural& Gender& Friendship& Self- Development& Personality& Romantic Love	Romantic Love& Family Ethics& Cross-Cultural& Gender& Friendship& Self-Development& Personality& Consumer Attitudes& Family Ethics& Public Morality& Privacy
Customs and Traditions		Marriage& Folk Customs& Festivals& Taboos& Clothing and Attire& Symbols	Marriage& Funeral
Lifestyles	Work&life&study	Work &Transportation& Entertainment &Diet/Food&Shopping&Im age&Learning&Health &Life&Association	Work & Entertainment &Diet/Food& Image&Learning&Health &Life&Association&sho pping
Social Etiquette	Gender Relations&Etiquette	Gender Relations& Communication Activities&Etiquette	Gender Relations& Communication Activities&Etiquette
Language and Writing		Chinese Characters &Names&Body Language	Names& Dialect
Chinese		Spring Festival / Chinese New Year &Notable Chinese People from Various Countries&Chinese Culture and Elements	

Third, knowledge culture emphasizes political and economic culture and art, while communicative culture focuses more on lifestyles, values, and social etiquette.

Based on the above information, the program offers several insights for our cultural teaching content:

First, it serves as material for Chinese language education. "Informal Talks" focuses on communicative culture, especially in lifestyles, social etiquette, and customs. The content is practical and accessible. Young representatives from different countries can share their views without needing advanced Chinese skills. The language used is mostly common daily expressions, making it easier for students to engage and learn about everyday communication. Second, it combines traditional culture with modern society. "Informal Talks" has received high praise not only for the influence of its guests but also for its precise topic selection. Chinese language teachers should connect traditional Chinese culture with modern society and current trends. This approach enhances the relevance of traditional culture and deepens students' understanding.

Finally, it serves as a resource for intercultural knowledge. In addition to its relevant topics, "Informal Talks" enriches the audience's understanding of intercultural issues. For example, it discusses taboos in various countries and different attitudes and customs regarding gift-giving. These topics help viewers understand other cultures. For Chinese learners and educators, understanding other cultures can help prevent cultural shock during intercultural communication.

4.3. Insights on Teaching Methods

Currently, cultural teaching mainly uses new media. Some schools lack clear teaching outlines and textbooks. Some teachers create their own handouts during the teaching process. They combine traditional teaching methods with new media.

Using film or variety show materials to support cultural teaching has become one of the most important methods for many Chinese language teachers.

4.4. Insights on Assessment Methods

We can gain some insights from the content of "Informal Talks." For example, in Season 3, before the main program, young representatives performed cultural topics they were interested in. This experiential form of cultural output can be applied to current methods of assessing cultural teaching.

It encourages students to actively engage in learning about Chinese culture, rather than just memorizing the teaching content.

5. Conclusion

In the current era of globalization, cultural soft power is becoming increasingly important in international competition. Promoting the development of Chinese international education and cultural teaching is significant for spreading Chinese culture worldwide.

The rise of domestic cultural variety shows and cross-cultural programs offers new ways for Chinese culture to integrate into global culture. Exploring how to combine these cultural shows with Chinese language teaching is important for improving teaching effectiveness and enriching teaching methods.

Currently, there are few cross-cultural variety shows, and their influence is less than that of other cultural programs. However, as Chinese international education grows, these programs will gain more attention and importance. More cross-cultural programs will emerge, further helping China integrate into the world.

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