

## Recent Reflections on Designing Content-Based Courses in Chinese Language Program

Yuqing Liu ([yuqing.liu@ubc.ca](mailto:yuqing.liu@ubc.ca)), Xiaowen Xu ([xiaowen.xu@ubc.ca](mailto:xiaowen.xu@ubc.ca))  
The University of British Columbia

### Introduction:

In North American universities, language programs aim to build students' communications skills and their ability to understand and interact with different cultures. For example, in content-based language courses, students are expected to gain a deeper awareness of the world of many intercultural communities. The learning outcomes of such a content-based course would help students become responsible citizens in a globalized world. In order to achieve those outcomes and make students' language learning meaningful, one needs to consider many factors, among which are diversity of students' needs and inclusiveness of students' perspectives. These can be very specific embodiments of the university's goals to respect and cultivate diversity and inclusiveness in education.

In recent years, institutional awareness of the need to add diversity and inclusiveness in language courses is evidently growing. This is both a challenge and an opportunity for many language programs. In this presentation, we will discuss how it has led to significant pedagogical transformations in content-based courses. In particular, we will demonstrate how it has an impact on instructor's selection of course readings and how students are encouraged to shape their learning with new approaches to these readings. We will also address the alignment of course assessments with the newly added learning outcomes. In the latter case, transparency in teaching and learning (TITL) will be introduced as a major pedagogical strategy to design and deliver content-based courses.

### Diversity on Course Readings

The incorporation of diversity and inclusivity in language courses has had a significant impact on the selection of course readings in content-based Chinese literature courses. Instructors are encouraged to include readings from a wide range of Chinese literary genres, including traditional and contemporary works, to expose students to diverse perspectives and experiences. Accordingly, we have expanded students' knowledge of Chinese literature to include the otherwise underrepresented writers and writings such as Sinophone literature and literature by female writers. We have also enabled students' critical skills to approach a diversity of literature in a globalized world.

Readings from a variety of authors, including those from different regions and ethnicities, are included to promote inclusivity and representation. As an illustration of our approach, we incorporate recent research in Sinophone studies when teaching Chinese literature courses. This enables us to situate Chinese literary works within the broader global flow of populations, languages, and cultures. In practice, this means including works by Chinese authors from a range of geographic locations, such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia, North America and

other areas, thereby expanding our students' understanding of Chinese literature beyond its traditional boundaries.

Moreover, we place a strong emphasis on incorporating a gender perspective in both the selection of course readings and the teaching approach to enhance inclusivity and diversity. We are intentional about giving equal weight to works by male and female writers. Instead of following conventional historical narrative of Chinese literature, we integrate recent theories and approaches in gender studies to amplify the voices of women and LGBTQ+ communities who have long been marginalized in the field. By employing this approach, we aim to guide students in critically engaging with and discussing works and writers that have been historically overlooked. As a result, our course cultivates critical reading skills that allow students to not only explore major themes in Chinese history, culture, and literature, but also identify blind spots and marginalized voices in traditional historical narratives. The development of this skill set is essential for success in academia and beyond, making our course a valuable tool for students seeking to broaden their perspectives and enhance their critical thinking abilities.

To further enhance diversity and inclusivity in course readings, instructors are also encouraged to incorporate readings from non-Chinese sources, such as works by authors from other cultures that have influenced or have been influenced by Chinese literature. This not only provides students with a more globalized view of Chinese literature but also fosters a deeper understanding of how literature can transcend cultural boundaries and serve as a means of communication across diverse communities.

### **Inclusivity on Student Learning**

One notable advantage that North American students bring to our courses is their exposure to multicultural communities and their proficiency in multiple languages. We believe that this advantage should be emphasized and leveraged in the context of content-based teaching and learning. By drawing upon the diverse experiences and language skills of our students, we are able to create a richer and more engaging learning environment that fosters deeper cross-cultural understanding and exchange. In the course, students gain a more profound understanding of cultures in their various levels, and, of their own accord, establish a more meaningful relationship to these various forms of cultures in appreciation, analysis, and even production of literature.

Students are encouraged to engage in critical discussion of the readings and to explore how they relate to their own experiences and perspectives. For example, when we introduced Taiwan indigenous literature and culture in our courses, we made a deliberate effort to connect the colonial experiences of indigenous peoples in Taiwan with similar indigenous histories in Canada. Through this comparative approach, we encouraged students to reflect on indigenous literature as a transnational theme by thinking about the meaning and significance of land acknowledgement that they encounter in almost every activity in Canada. By making these connections and encouraging critical reflection, we aim to foster in our students a deeper understanding of the complex issues and experiences that shape our contemporary global society.

The incorporation of diversity and inclusivity in Chinese literature courses encourages students to consider how literature can be used as a means of communication and understanding across diverse communities. Students are encouraged to explore the intersections of literature with issues of identity, gender, race, and culture, and to reflect on their own identities and experiences in relation to the readings. This not only fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of the complexities of Chinese literature but also promotes empathy and understanding of diverse perspectives and experiences.

### **Transparency and Innovation of Course Assessments**

In all the above efforts, we have engaged transparency in teaching and learning (TITL) as a major pedagogical strategy. Recent research indicates that TITL is an effective approach to enhance the quality of higher education learning experience and mitigate disparities (Howell 2022). It emphasizes clear communication of learning goals and assessment criteria, and encourages students to reflect on their own learning processes and progress as a pedagogical innovation that makes teaching inclusive of their perspectives. Its foundation is thus built on the principles of access and relevance, which “imply that students should be able to understand the work that is required of them, as well as reasons why such work was designed in a particular manner,” and “advocate for enabling students to perceive learning to be useful” (Lakshminarayanan and Best 2022, 136). To incorporate TILT into Chinese content courses, assessments may include critical analysis of course readings from diverse perspectives, reflection on how the readings relate to issues of identity and culture, and exploration of how literature can be used to bridge cultural divides.

For example, we have designed a “creative project” as part of our course assessment, which invites students to critically engage with course readings through various creative forms of their own choice from their distinct perspectives. This assignment allows students to work in groups and use creative formats such as short stories, short films, video games, cartoons, or rap songs to rewrite a literary work. Through this process, students can reflect on the critical issues that have been explored and discussed in the course and their relevance to the contemporary world. By doing so, we aim to ignite students’ creativity and provide them with an opportunity to collaborate with their classmates and apply their learning in new and innovative ways. Through this project, students not only demonstrate their understanding of the course content but also showcase their ability to think critically and express themselves creatively.

In summary, by renovation of course contents, reconstruction of course learning outcomes, and reinvention of course assessments, we aim to provide university students with a diverse and inclusive learning experience that can construct their globalized view of the world and that can nurture them into open-minded and responsible world citizens.

### **References:**

Howell, Dorothy J. 2022. “Disparity in Higher Education and the Need for Equitable Teaching Paradigms and Strategies.” In *Integrating Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT): An Effective Tool for Providing Equitable Opportunity in Higher Education*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

Lakshminarayanan, Sambhavi, and Simon Best. 2022. “Implementing TILT in Business Education: Content, Pedagogies, and a Generalized Toolkit.” In *Integrating Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT): An Effective Tool for Providing Equitable Opportunity in Higher Education*, 135–60. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

Shaping UBC’s next century: Strategic Plan 2018-2028. UBC, 2018.  
Transparency in Teaching and Learning. (<https://tilthighered.com/>)