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文化交流在汉语课堂教学中的运用与启发

Exertion and Inspiration of Cultural Communications in TCSL Classes

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Abstract: There are various challenges in teaching and learning Chinese as a second language, not just because of its unique written structure and its special pronunciation system, but because of the cultural phenomena embedded in this particular language. Aware of the difficulties in helping students with their writing Chinese characters and producing Chinese tonic sounds, this paper intends to focus on the exertion and inspiration of cultural communications in the classroom. Selecting eight highlighted values in Chinese culture, namely, 孝(xiào)、悌(tì)、忠(zhōng)、信(xìn)、礼(lǐ)、义(yì)、廉(lián)、耻(chǐ), the writer tries to negotiate between the Self and the Other while sharing cultural practices experimented in the classroom.

摘要: 在汉语作为第二语言教学过程中, 无论是汉语语言文字本身的特殊结构, 还是其独特的语音规则, 乃至孕育其中的文化内涵, 都是教学者不可回避的挑战。本文着重探讨教学课堂上的文化活动。通过和学生学习交流中华八大传统美德: 孝、悌、忠、信、礼、义、廉、耻, 作者经历了某种自我与他者的文化对话。本文意欲分享该文化交流过程中所面临的一些挑战和所受到的一些启发。

I. Reviewing the Definitions of Culture

When trying to define culture, Sardar and Loon, scholars of cultural studies, pointed out, “the ambiguity of the concept of culture is notorious. Some anthropologists consider culture to be social behaviour. For others, it is not behaviour at all, but an abstraction from behaviour. To some stone axes and a pottery, dance and music, fashion and style constitute culture; while no material object can be culture to others.”¹ Nevertheless, no matter how profound the culture may be, one thing is for sure: culture belongs to human beings. Whether it is a product, a tradition, an observed custom, or a cherished value in a community, the concept of culture is intrinsically human. It can be inferred that culture essentially covers all the relationships of human beings. Although human relationships cover many areas of interactions involving human beings, ranging from that between human beings and the supernatural, human beings and nature, and human beings and objects, the interrelationship among human beings themselves is paramount in the establishment of a civilized society, and thus much focus on cultural studies has been directed to the relationship on the individuals within societies. Raymond Williams, one of the founders of cultural studies, claims that “culture includes the organization of production, the structure of the family, the structure of institutions which express or govern social

relationships, the characteristic forms through which members of the society communicate.”² When sharing Chinese culture with my students, I tried to find some cultural features that dominate the relationships among Chinese people. The highlighted values in Chinese culture, namely, 孝(xiào)、悌(tì)、忠(zhōng)、信(xìn)、礼(lǐ)、义(yì)、廉(lián)、耻(chǐ) have provided me and my students a very interesting and inspiring journey of searching and learning.

II. Exertion in Searching and Sharing

In the beginning, it's very hard to decide which part of Chinese culture with my students I should share, considering the limitless concepts of culture. While the multifarious definitions of culture gave me a headache on which aspects of Chinese culture to choose, the long history of China, its diverse geographical features, and its varied ethnic groups drove me many more times to near failure. The more I researched, the less confident I became on choosing my topics, and the more doubtful I got. Is Chinese culture itself even explicitly defined? So many traditions and values belong to Chinese culture, but they are just part of Chinese culture, and none of them seems to be qualified for the all-encompassing title of Chinese culture standing alone. Even when I was almost there on what to share, I still found it's not easy to make a choice. There is only one hour each week to help the students touch the core of Chinese culture. This is not a task that I could venture with a light heart. Should only the beautiful or positive aspects be shared? How can some Chinese morals and values be deeply taught to, or at least made to be understood by non-Chinese students?

After I finally made the tough choice on what to share, the ways to share became another problem. I found myself in very complicated feelings when I was sharing some of the Chinese cultural virtues. On talking about 孝(xiào) and 悌(tì), we read a story and watched a video of 邹(zōu)瑛(yīng)引(yǐn)过(guò). While being aware of the value of 孝(xiào) and 悌(tì) in Chinese traditional culture, I realized that I was becoming embarrassed at the reality of how this value has not been well observed among younger generations in China today. I felt proud that these virtues of 孝(xiào) and 悌(tì) are so beautifully presented in the story, but I also felt deeply regretful about the big gap between the reality and the tradition. Also my personal prejudice that Chinese families have closer relationship among its members has been in constant self-questioning. How close and healthy is the relationship of Chinese parents and children? What has bound the relationship? Is the relationship tied more with the younger generations' 孝(xiào) or more with the older generations' caring or even sacrificing? Is it true that the relationship between the younger generations and older generations in Caucasian families is not as close as that of Chinese families as assumed? Am I expressing my pride when sharing this cultural virtue to my Caucasian students? Do I genuinely have this privilege? Is it culturally legitimate to demonstrate my pride? How can I manage it not to express it as a cultural superiority or inferiority?

At the same time, there are fundamental questions that I cannot avoid when sharing those Chinese cultural virtues with my students: who am I? Where am I supposed to stand? Am I a proud Chinese person, or purely a language educator? How much can I be attached or unattached to my motherland Chinese culture? For instance, we learnt a story of 德(dé)言(yán)对(duì)经(jīng) when talking about 礼(lǐ). I was trying to be objective, addressing Chinese culture from the view of the third person, but I found myself in an unconscious battle of talking about Chinese culture from the view of the first person. That is to say, I found it hard not to use phrases such as “We Chinese” or “In our Chinese culture”. Especially when asked why Chinese people like to talk loudly in the public, and some Chinese keep talking with food in our mouth, I felt myself in a sort of defensive position trying to make some ineffective explanations. In a very gentle way, one student told me that he heard a story from BBC. When one North Korean, who had stayed in China for some time after escaping from North Korea, was asked why to choose to come to Canada instead of staying in China, he explained when people bumped into each other in China, they would criticize each other with words like “Are you blind?” But here in Canada, people would say, “I’m sorry.” Upon hearing this, I felt shamefully painful. Even though I knew I cannot deny it, spontaneously I began my defensive argument. While believing what he said is true, I insisted that the scenario might be true, but it should not mean it exists everywhere in China. Most Chinese people are kind and courteous. And most importantly, we have a long tradition to value the courtesy. What’s more, although most people here in Canada are very friendly, we do encounter some mean people now and then. With all these arguments, I hoped that I would feel better, but on the contrary, I felt even more inadequate. I comprehended that I was still talking from the Self perspective of Being Chinese and I do not like the Other to criticize my Own culture even if what is said is a matter of fact.

III. Inspirations in Examinations

If the quintessence of Chinese cultural values comes from Ancient scholars like Confucius and Mo, the core beliefs and traditions of the Western World are from the Bible. Sharing the Chinese cultural values with my students offered me one more chance to review those highlighted values in both Chinese culture and Western culture. Not surprisingly, both my students and I have found similar ideas of 孝(xiào), 悌(tì)、 忠(zhōng)、 信(xìn)、 礼(lǐ)、 义(yì)、 廉(lián)、 耻(chǐ) in the Bible. For instance, in Bible Ephesians 6:1-4 “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother—which is the first commandment with a promise--- that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” (similar to Chinese 孝 xiào) In Galatians 5:13-14 “You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another. The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (similar to 悌 tì) And there are a number of verses on obedience to one’s authority (忠 zhōng). Here is just one example: in Hebrews 13:17, “Obey your leaders and submit to their

authority.” Also there are quite a few verses on righteousness (义 yì) such as the verse in Matthew 5:6, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness: for they shall be filled.” One can also easily find out the ideas of (信 xìn)、廉(lián)、耻(chǐ) in the ten commandments: “You shall not commit adultery” 耻(chǐ) . “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (信 xìn). “You shall not steal. You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s” (廉 lián). And in Galatians 5:22, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” The more we shared, the more similarities we found, and the closer we felt. Although those values are written in different linguistic signs, their meanings are the same and the roles they play in each society are of the same importance.

When we were happily celebrating our mutual understanding of the eight highlighted Chinese virtues, one of my students asked me one question: how important is *love* 爱(ài) in Chinese culture? My instant response was that *Love* is not so well expressed in the fairly reserved Chinese culture. However, neither I myself nor my students were satisfied with this simple answer. Then we launched a careful study on the definitions of *love* in both Chinese culture and western culture. After some research in different dictionaries, websites and some books, we got some very interesting discoveries. Take a few examples, according to Wikipedia, the concept of Love in Chinese culture has been explained in a very comprehensive way.

“Two philosophical underpinnings of love exist in the Chinese tradition, one from Confucianism which emphasized actions and duty while the other came from Mohism which championed a universal love. A core concept to Confucianism is Ren ("benevolent love", 仁), which focuses on duty, action and attitude in a relationship rather than love itself. In Confucianism, one displays benevolent love by performing actions such as filial piety from children, kindness from parent, loyalty to the king and so forth... Later in Chinese Buddhism, the term Ai (爱) was adopted to refer to a passionate caring love and was considered a fundamental desire. In Buddhism, Ai was seen as capable of being either selfish or selfless, the latter being a key element towards enlightenment.”³

While this explanation of *love* in Chinese culture seems abstract and grandiose, the definition of love in Ancient Greek (one source of Western culture) appears analytical and logical: There are four distinct words for love in Greek: *agápe*, *éros*, *phília*, and *storgē*. *agápe* means unconditional love and God's divine love. *éros* is passionate love, with sensual desire and longing. It refers to sexual love. *phília* means friendship or affectionate love. It refers to fervent love for another person. It includes loyalty to friends, family, and community, and requires virtue, equality and familiarity. *storgē* means "affection", natural affection felt by parents for offspring. It is almost exclusively as a

descriptor of relationships within the family.⁴ According to the Greek definition, Love can be divided into four levels from family to friends, then to spouse, finally to soul love and Godly love. And the description of love in the Bible sounds simple, clear and specific: “Love is patient; love is kind. It does not envy; it does not boast; it is not proud. It does not dishonor others; it is not self-seeking; it is not easily angered; it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres.”⁵

On studying these definitions of *Love* in both languages and cultures, I enjoyed wandering about in the indistinct vastness of the descriptions of *Love* in Chinese culture, and I also gained comfort and relaxation in the explicit explanation of *Love* in Western culture. After examination, we came to an agreement that the essence of every cultural tradition is the same if not similar. In terms of viewing human relationship, both Chinese and Western culture value kindness, righteousness, gentleness, respect etc. The differences exist in the ways of expression and how far or how well each society or community has put those principles into practice. Each society is structured with individuals living as family members, functioning in the net of authority and subjection, and communicating among peers. The fundamental cultural virtues each society celebrates cannot be dramatically different. Especially when I taste the beauty of *Love* in both English and Chinese, the cultural sharing experience rewards me some freedom of cultural superiority and inferiority, and I feel free not to be burdened to identify myself to a certain culture, for *Love* is above all, and what we could do is to embrace those beautiful cultural virtues as a universal heritage not as a prestige of one culture.

Notes:

1. In Sardar and Loon’s discussion, culture is a very controversy term, which has attracted many temptations to define, but failed to come to an agreement. (1997:13).
2. Ibid.
3. Please visit <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/love>
4. Please visit http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_words_for_love#cite_note
5. Corinthians 13:4-7 from Bible

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