

## Research on Cultural Awareness and Cultural Confidence in Chinese International Teaching

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**Abstract:** China has made remarkable achievement in economy development. Accordingly, Chinese language and Chinese culture have also gained great attention worldwide. The paper firstly demonstrates the concept of “culture”, “cultural awareness”, and “cultural confidence”. The paper highlights the great significance and necessity of being aware of fine traditional Chinese culture. Moreover, it explores the strategies of being aware of Chinese culture and how to build up cultural self-confidence for international Chinese teachers. Finally, the paper comes to three major findings which include Finding 1. research and inheritance of the “root” of Chinese culture; Finding 2. the major principles of being aware of culture and culture self-confidence; Finding 3. manifested in full confidence in the future of Chinese culture.

### 1. Introduction

In recent years, China's economy has developed rapidly, and it has achieved world-renowned achievements. Gradually, the demand for learning Chinese becomes stronger all over the world. Chinese talents who have been trained with Chinese language skills are becoming more and more popular in the job market. At present, many countries have incorporated Chinese into their national education systems and offered Chinese courses in universities, middle schools and even primary schools. According to official data released by Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban), up to date July 2020, China had established 541 Confucius Institutes and 1,193 Confucius Classrooms in primary and secondary schools in 154 countries and regions. There are currently 2.1 million registered students and 46,000 Chinese and foreign full-time and part-time teachers, which shows that there is a wave of Chinese learning fever around the world (see Figure 1). And special note that due to the impact of COVID-19 on global economy and education, the number of Confucius Institutes has decreased slightly. To a certain extent, Confucius Institute brought remarkable influence of Chinese culture to the outside world. Furthermore, Chinese international teaching enhances the understanding of Chinese language and culture among people from all countries (regions). On the other hand, it strengthens educational and cultural exchanges and cooperation between China and other countries, develops friendly relations between China and other countries, as well as promotes the development of multicultural world, and builds a harmonious world.

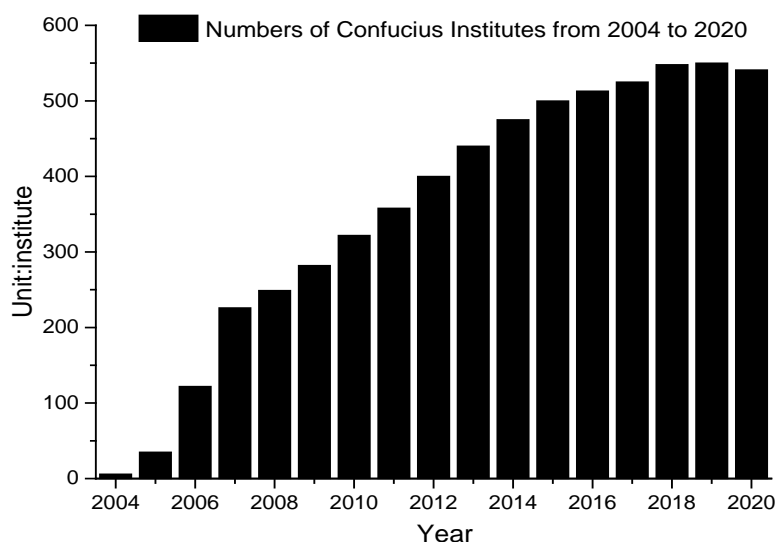


Figure 1: Numbers of Confucius Institutes in the world

As British linguist Lyons. mentioned in the book *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*: the historical connection exists between language and culture, and language is the key to open the significant cultural treasure. It is difficult to fully understand language itself without the cultural background that language naturally attaches to. Therefore, while learning a language, one must learn the related culture background knowledge of the language. According to Xu Jialu's Speech at the Conference Commemorating the 40th Anniversary of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, she remarked that "Chinese International Promotion initiative was confirmed and incorporated into the international strategic development framework in July, 2005". In the process of international introduction and promotion of Chinese, the teaching task is not basically confined to enabling Chinese learners to master the ontological knowledge of Chinese, and training students' communicative skills such as listening, speaking, reading, as well as writing. The more important goal is to introduce Chinese culture to Chinese learners so that they are influenced gradually by Chinese culture. While studying Chinese language, Chinese learners should also understand China's national cultural background, history, Chinese human geography, and the essence of Chinese traditional culture, etc.

In other words, Language is regarded as the bridge and link of communication. Xu Lin pointed out in the article "Forms and Tasks of Chinese International Promotion": Chinese international educators should shoulder an important role as a bridge and link between China and other countries in the world to turn the "fever of Chinese language learning" into "fever of Chinese culture learning."

## 2. The Concept of "Culture"

People's understanding on "culture" differs as the concept of "culture" is especially complicated. There are various definitions of "culture", and people have different perceptions on culture. The word "culture" in English comes from the Latin "cultura", and "cultura" is derived from "cultus", which is the past participle form of "colere". The basic meaning of "colere (colo)" is "cultivation, cultivation; grooming, dressing; admiration, worship, sacrifice". The original meaning of "culture" in English is: farming, living, practicing, paying attention, worshiping God, and it is also used as a metaphor for human activities.

Since the early 16th century, the original meaning of "cultura" has basically

expanded from the field of animal husbandry to the process of human development, from cultivating crops to cultivating the mind. According to Thompson, John B.'s book, *Ideology and Modern Culture*: By the end of the 18th century, the word “culture” was used as an individual noun in French and English language to describe the continuous process of human development, and even orders of civilization. In the late 18th and mid-19th centuries, the word “culture” began to be adopted in referring to general processes or the products of such processes. Therefore, it can be concluded from the cognitive changes in the concept of “civilization”, that the word “culture” has been given new meanings. Behind this new definition, it is the spiritual influence by the European Enlightenment and its belief in the progress of the modern era.

### **2.1. An Introduction to “Cultural Awareness”**

The concept of “Cultural Awareness” was proposed by Prof. Fei Xiaotong in 1997. At the 2nd Advanced Seminar on Social and Cultural Anthropology organized by the Institute of Sociology and Anthropology of Peking University, Prof. Fei proposed “Cultural Awareness” for the first time. In other words, people living in a certain cultural and historical circle have self-knowledge of its culture with an all-rounded understanding of its history of development and future. In short, cultural awareness is cultural self-consciousness, self-reflection, and self-creation. According to Mr. Fei, he once emphasized and highlighted: “Cultural awareness is an arduous process. Only by knowing and understanding his or her own civilization, and being exposed to the infrastructure of multiple cultures can the conditions establish one’s position in this emerging multicultural world. After independent adaptation, it is necessary to work with other cultures to learn from each other’s spirits, and jointly establish a basic order that is recognized by each other and a set of principles of coexistence in which multiple cultures can coexist peacefully, as so to express their strengths, and multi-culture developing together.”

According to Mr. Fei's point of view mentioned above, the foundation of cultural consciousness is the prerequisite of multiple cultures. When teaching Chinese as a foreign language, international Chinese teachers are inevitably exposed to a multicultural environment. In the process of Chinese language promotion or the dissemination of Chinese culture, in the context of multiple cultures, it is important for each Chinese international educator to be able to self-awaken, self-reflection, and self-creation of the subject’s source culture.

### **2.2. An Introduction to “Cultural Confidence”**

The concept of “cultural confidence” was first proposed by General Secretary Xi Jinping. In the thirteenth collective study of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee on February 24, 2014, Xi Jinping proposed for the first time to “enhance cultural self-confidence and self-confidence in values.” From 2015 to 2016, Xi Jinping stated many times: “To enhance cultural awareness and cultural self-confidence, it is essential to strengthen road self-confidence, theoretical self-confidence, and system self-confidence.” In May and June of 2016, General Secretary Xi Jinping had two consecutive highlight “culture self-confidence” that “we must strengthen our confidence in the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, our theoretical confidence, and our institutional confidence. In the final analysis, we must maintain our cultural confidence.” It is worth emphasizing that when it comes to “cultural self-confidence”, culture is generally one-sidedly understood as traditional Chinese culture. The indeed connotation of “cultural self-confidence” proposed by General Secretary Xi is not limited to Chinese traditional excellent culture, but also

includes Chinese revolutionary culture and advanced socialist culture as well. Organically, these three aspects institute the socialist culture with Chinese characteristics, and none of them are indispensable. For Chinese people, there are reasons and foundations to be self-confident based on Chinese firm road in building self-confidence, theoretical confidence, and institutional confidence. The essence of “cultural confidence” is cultural self-confidence based on more than 5,000 years of cultural heritage.

In addition, international Chinese teachers as Chinese language spread ambassador should establish self-confidence in Chinese national culture. Cross-cultural training should help them recognize and accept the existence of cultural differences, promote an understanding between cultures, care about conservation, and influence the values and behaviors of cultural peoples. Cultural self-confidence is basically self-cognition of cultural subjects of their own culture.

### **3. Strategies of being Aware and Confident in Chinese International Teaching**

In the process of teaching Chinese for those learners who study Chinese as a foreign language, it is necessary for the teachers to get known and fully understand comprehensively the Chinese cultural history, cultural connotation, and political system in order to better carry out cultural inheritance and development, thereby building cultural self-confidence themselves. Cultural self-confidence plays a crucial role in promoting the “Four Self-confidence”, which is conducive to the realization of national rejuvenation and prosperity in China. In addition, making most use of the advantages of cultural self-confidence in ideology plays a vital role in the promotion of China's cultural soft power and international discourse power.

#### **3.1. Being Aware of Chinese Culture in Culture Inheritance**

Inheritance is one of the essences of culture, and the development of any culture is inseparable from the reflection on the inheritance of historical culture. Cultural reflection is the inheritance and development of history and a prerequisite for the realization of cultural consciousness. As an international teacher of Chinese, it is great significance to first explore the “root” of Chinese culture, and additionally generate a sense of cultural identity, and then carry out cultural reflection and self-awakening. Cultural consciousness is the psychological basis of cultural self-confidence, the basic cognition of people's own national culture, and the understanding of national culture in practical life. The conscious externalization of the traditional cultural spirit is to establish a sense of responsibility, then consciously follow and grasp the essence of cultural traditions. More importantly, identity must not only be internalized in thought, but also externalized in practical activities. In the actual practice of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, Chinese teachers can resist the ideological influence of foreign heterogeneous cultures only on the basis of certain emotional belonging, cultural identity and psychological identity. On another, the spread of Chinese culture overseas will inevitably collide with foreign cultures. Moreover, the Chinese learners' perceptions of language and intercultural learning depend on their teachers' reaction and remarks in the teaching. As their responses on identified cultural which they drew to make sense of the new environment are accordingly influenced by teachers greatly. International Chinese teachers should always pay attention to maintaining firm self-awareness and rational understanding in giving lectures and teaching behavior of Chinese teachers in the classrooms.

#### **3.2. Being Confident on Chinese Culture as Time Changing**

Timeliness is another essence of culture. In the process of human civilization, each era has its own cultural characteristics. The changes of these times will cause the variation of cultural characteristics. Yang Huairen wrote in the book *Culture and Translation*: Each new stage should inherit the cultural achievements of the past, but retain the characteristics of its own era. American New York Times columnist T. Friedman wrote a book *The World Is Flat*. He believes that: The Internet and other new technologies that change with each passing day have promoted a new level of globalization. On this flattened world platform, although it has the potential to homogenize the world's diverse cultures, he believes that it has a greater potential to promote cultural “difference” and “diversity”. From the discussion of “culture” in Chapter 2, it can conclude that the relationship between culture and civilization. Therefore, culture is a historical civilization that is subordinate to history and a culture that is undergoing historical changes. A culture that perfectly connects history and modernity is a culture that truly develops. Hence, under the impact of modern science and updated technology, the realization of cultural awareness in the process of human cultural modernization requires international Chinese teachers to reflect on the historical accumulation in culture, prepare to grasp the cultural development problems in the modernization process, and actively respond to the impact of multiculturalism in Chinese international education.

At last, in the process of Chinese internationalization, some countries still be resistant to Chinese culture sometimes, and even have prejudices against Chinese political and cultural systems. In fact, the promotion of Chinese language and Chinese culture is a systematic project, which requires gradual progress and strengthens the sense of self-identity in continuous self-reflection. Chinese international educators of should not be anxious, but always maintain cultural awakening and continuously enhance cultural self-confidence. In line with the principle of advocating peace and harmonious coexistence, respect the diversity of world culture, the final goal for Chinese international teaching is devoted to learning from each other's strengths, find the balance between Chinese culture and other countries' cultures, and achieve the ultimate goal of culture prosperity and development.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Chinese culture is extensive and profound, with a long history. It is the spiritual wealth of all Chinese people and also a treasure of human history. Whereas, teachers of Chinese as an international language should not only shoulder the task of promoting the Chinese language internationally, but also play the role of “ambassadors” for the spread of Chinese culture. To make a conclusion, the major findings in the discussion and analysis above, Finding1. Cultural awareness is based on the search for and inheritance of the “root” of culture. Finding 2. Based on the criticism and development of “truth”, the major principles of being aware of culture is to remove the false and keep the true, to remove the dross, and retain the essence. Finding 3. Cultural awareness and culture self-confidence are manifested in full confidence in the future of Chinese culture, full confidence in the development path of socialist culture with Chinese characteristics, and full confidence in a socialist cultural power. As matter of fact, cultural consciousness is a deep understanding of the role of cultural status, and the laws of culture development, and an active responsibility for the development of culture history.

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