

Research on the Application of the Museum Construction Model in Cultural Course Teaching for International Students

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Abstract:

Constructivism emphasizes that learners build their understanding of things in their own way with the help of others. The educational function of museums can fully utilize resources such as historical artifacts, ecological scene displays, multimedia technologies, etc., to provide authentic learning environments for visitors. The combination of both creates a museum construction model, which effectively helps learners engage in self-exploratory learning. Cultural courses for international students face challenges such as difficult technical terms, lack of concrete visual aids, and complex language styles. Applying the museum construction model to these courses helps international students better understand and experience Chinese culture, fosters their interest in learning Chinese, and reduces cross-cultural communication barriers. Different cultural exhibitions can introduce rich cultural teaching innovations, such as situational methods, exploratory discovery, problem-based learning, group research, and cooperative learning. This paper, based on the "Reference Framework," takes the Shaanxi History Museum as an example to demonstrate the innovation and application of the museum construction model in cultural course teaching for international students.

Keywords: Constructivism; Museum; Cultural Course for International Students; "Reference Framework"

I. Introduction

In the context of globalization, improving the quality and content of international Chinese education is a key pathway to enhancing the international confidence in Chinese culture and promoting its global dissemination. Facing international students or overseas students, how to communicate effectively and which teaching methods to use to guide and help students understand, experience, and perceive Chinese culture are current research focuses in international Chinese cultural education. In cultural teaching, teachers must respect cultural diversity, promote cultural exchange and mutual learning, and build a "dissemination of the other" matrix, which is a significant

challenge in international Chinese cultural teaching.¹ Thus, it is clear that in the new era, international Chinese cultural education should not be limited to traditional lecture-based methods within the classroom. The “teacher speaks, students listen” method, or “instructive” teaching, fails to meet the goals and requirements of modern international Chinese cultural education. Instead, there should be a systematic optimization of classroom content, a clear focus on creating cultural practices, enriching the materials in the “other’s image” of China’s national image, enhancing the social practice and cultural experience of international students in China, and enriching their understanding of China, while building a platform for people-to-people exchange.² To achieve these cultural teaching goals, there is an urgent need to reform and innovate the content and model of cultural education courses for international students.

Museums are unique resources and platforms for national education, playing a crucial role in social education. At the same time, museums are repositories of human civilization, important places for cultural dialogue among countries, and bridges connecting artifacts with visitors from around the world. In recent years, domestic museums have made numerous explorations and innovations in telling “China’s story well.” To make artifacts truly “come to life,” there is a need to build a complete and effective system for the dissemination and narration of Chinese artifact stories. Museums in the new era have the following features: rich and colorful historical artifacts, diversified narrative methods, engaging sensory experiences, and digital immersive interactions. These characteristics align perfectly with the content and teaching design approaches of international Chinese cultural courses in the new era. How can we better utilize museums for teaching? John Falk proposed the “museum learning” theory, based on constructivist learning theory, discussing its application in museum learning, while extending theories such as “interactive experience mode,” “situational learning mode,” and identity-related “conceptual visit motivation.” Can these museum-based educational theories be integrated with cultural course teaching for international students to innovate a construction model that can be implemented in any museum for cultural teaching activities? This would ultimately improve the effectiveness of cultural courses for international students.³ This paper, under the perspective of the “Reference Framework,” combines the rich collections of the Shaanxi History Museum to explore the application of the museum construction model in cultural course teaching for international students, aiming to provide innovative teaching resources and models for cultural courses aimed at international students.

II. Research Background

Current research on integrating museums with cultural courses for international students mainly focuses on the following aspects: (1) The application of museum resources in cultural courses for international students.

¹ Ma Chunyan. Research on the Innovative Pathways for International Students in China to Tell China’s Story Well [J]. *Shenzhou Scholar*, January 2023 Edition

² Ma Chunyan. Research on the Innovative Pathways for International Students in China to Tell China’s Story Well [J]. *Shenzhou Scholar*, January 2023 Edition

³ Zhao Xingyu. From “Situation” to “Identity” — Development and Evolution of John Falk’s Museum Learning Theory Model [J]. *Science Education and Museums*, 2017, 3(4)

Some articles analyze the feasibility and specific content of combining cultural teaching for international students with museums from the perspectives of resource sharing, cultural education, and cultural services. They mention that cultural teaching can utilize museum resources to develop a variety of teaching programs, collaborate with museums for teacher training, and enhance teaching aids and textbooks through museum resources.⁴ An article takes Jiangxi Provincial Museum as an example, listing four methods: exhibition dissemination, cultural lecture dissemination, cultural product dissemination, and internet dissemination. It designs teaching practices using “ancient culture” and “red culture” resources based on the teaching situation at the Confucius Institute at the University of Antananarivo in Madagascar and students’ understanding of museum resources.⁵ Additionally, research using two types of museums in Nanning as case studies explores the auxiliary role of museums in cultural course teaching for international students.⁶ (2) Research on combining museums with teaching models, including: museum situational cultural teaching⁷, museum experiential teaching model⁸, and museum-based cultural teaching strategies.⁹ By combining different models with museum resources, the practice of museum cultural teaching is demonstrated. (3) Integration of digital museums with cultural teaching for international students. There is research combining digital museums with ceramic culture, designing and practicing digital museum applications in ceramic culture teaching¹⁰. Other articles explore the digital dissemination model of museum artifacts, focusing on the roles of “cloud exhibitions” and the integration of virtual and physical spaces in artifact dissemination. They analyze the dissemination model that extends digital space infinitely and integrates virtual and physical elements.¹¹ Through analyzing related research on museum-based cultural course teaching for international students, it is evident that considerable research focuses on using museum resources for such teaching.

The Shaanxi History Museum, known as the “Pearl of the Ancient Capital and Treasure of China,” houses four major collections: bronze artifacts from the Shang and Zhou dynasties, pottery figures from various dynasties,

⁴ Li Ling. A Study on the Utilization of Museum Resources in Teaching Chinese Culture to Foreigners [D]. Chongqing Normal University, 2013.

⁵ Xie Yurou. Application of Jiangxi Provincial Museum Resources in Teaching Chinese Culture in International Education — A Case Study of Confucius Institute at University of Antananarivo, Madagascar [D]. Jiangxi Normal University, 2023.

⁶ Chen Sisi. Practical Research on the Auxiliary Role of Two Types of Museums in Teaching Chinese Culture to Foreigners [D]. Guangxi University, 2019.

⁷ Zheng Xiaowei. Research on Situational Cultural Teaching in Museums for International Students [D]. Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, May 2022

⁸ Xu Jing, Wu Jing. Practice and Reflection on Experiential Learning Courses in Museums — A Case Study of Shanghai Museum College [J]. Science Education and Museums, 2024(1): 90-97

⁹ Li Qianzi. Research on the “Museum-Style” Approach to Teaching Chinese Culture to Foreigners [D]. Hunan Normal University, May 2014

¹⁰ Ding Yuxiao. Research on Ceramic Culture Teaching Based on Digital Museums [D]. Qingdao University, June 2022

¹¹ Wang Liping. Research on the Digital Dissemination Model of Museum Artifacts [J]. Cultural Relics Authentication and Appreciation, 2024(7)

gold and silver artifacts from the Han and Tang dynasties, and murals from Tang tombs. These collections are notable for their diversity, quantity, high status, and complete evolutionary sequence. The principle of “telling history through objects” enables visitors to better understand and appreciate the development of ancient Chinese history. This paper constructs a teaching model using the Shaanxi History Museum as an example. Based on the characteristics of cultural course content for international students, it integrates museum resources into “living culture,” “tangible culture,” and “adaptable culture at various levels.” These resources are categorized into specific artifact elements, exhibit information elements, and online resource elements, extracting and classifying the Chinese cultural elements they represent. In teaching Chinese culture to international students, the Shaanxi History Museum’s resource images and videos are used to support teaching. Through visual and auditory methods, abstract and distant knowledge is brought closer to students, presenting tangible “images” and videos that aid students in understanding abstract cultural concepts.

III. Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation of the museum construction model is primarily constructivism. Constructivism posits that knowledge is not acquired through teacher transmission; rather, it is constructed by learners in a specific context, that is, within a socio-cultural background, with the assistance of teachers and peers, and through the use of essential learning materials in a process of meaningful construction. Constructivism emphasizes that learners construct their understanding of things in their own way with the help of others. Constructivism views teaching not as the transfer of content, but as the creation of an environment and support to encourage learners to actively construct the meaning of knowledge. Considering the teaching characteristics of cultural courses for international students in China and the learning characteristics of these students, traditional cultural courses are primarily lecture-based, with the teacher as the main information provider. In this process, it is uncertain whether students can fully understand the content, grasp the cultural connotations, or appreciate the values behind it. Additionally, there are often limited opportunities for students to practice oral expression, showcase their ideas, or engage in interactive activities within cultural courses. Therefore, it is necessary to incorporate the constructivist model appropriately into cultural courses for international students in China. This approach encourages students to actively construct the meaning of knowledge, enhancing their language expression skills and their understanding of culture.

Constructivist theory views the creation of context as an essential component of instructional design, which aligns well with the educational function of museums. The essence of museum education is all the efforts made by museums to fulfill their “educational mission,” including the various products and services launched by museums with an educational purpose. This “educational mission” of museums is realized because “museum users” have a desire to use museum spaces or resources for learning. Learning and education are not merely about the active versus passive distinction; they are shifts in perspective, content, method, and objective. Learning encompasses more than just acquiring knowledge and facts; it also involves acquiring methods, modes of thinking, and ways of practice. The educational function of museums makes full use of historical artifacts, recreations of historical scenes, contrasts between history and the modern era, and digital interactive experiences to provide visitors with authentic learning contexts. The integration of constructivist theory with the educational function of

museums forms the museum construction model, effectively facilitating self-exploratory and innovative learning for learners.

IV. Teaching Innovation with the Museum Construction Model

Chinese tea culture is part of the curriculum for international students at the elementary and intermediate levels. China is the birthplace of tea. Shennong tasted hundreds of herbs and used tea as an antidote; Lu Yu wrote the “Tea Classic,” which initiated the tea ceremony. Tea was one of the eight refined interests of the ancient Chinese scholars—“qin, qi, shu, hua, shi, jiu, hua, cha” (zither, chess, calligraphy, painting, poetry, wine, flowers, and tea)—and one of the seven daily necessities for ordinary people: “chai, mi, you, yan, jiang, cu, cha” (firewood, rice, oil, salt, soy sauce, vinegar, and tea). In teaching tea culture to international students, traditional lessons cover topics such as the history of tea, types of tea, tea utensils, tea-drinking customs, tea art, and tea ceremonies. However, international students might not fully understand or may lose interest in the process. Therefore, by integrating the museum construction model, students’ initiative and enthusiasm can be stimulated, enabling them to apply learned language points and cultural knowledge immediately. This approach also incorporates cross-cultural communication, cultural comparisons, and understanding cultural conflicts, thus breaking away from the monotony of traditional teaching. The specific teaching process is as follows.

First, based on the cultural teaching proficiency levels in the “Reference Framework,” a context conducive to learners constructing meaning is created. The Royal Tea Utensils unearthed from Famen Temple, displayed in the “Treasures of Shaanxi” special exhibition at the Shaanxi History Museum, can be utilized for teaching innovation. The teacher begins by introducing basic knowledge of Chinese tea culture in the classroom, covering the history of tea, types of tea, tea utensils, tea-drinking etiquette, and the philosophy of tea, while teaching essential cultural vocabulary and sentence structures. Next, the teacher and students visit the Shaanxi History Museum, where the teacher assigns group tasks. In the “Tea as a National Drink” section, students search for the oldest wild tea trees and leaves, photographing and documenting their findings. In the “Era of Tea Sages,” they locate maps of the Tea Horse Road and the Silk Tea Road and learn about their histories. In the “Tang Dynasty Tea Art” section, students collect information on ancient tea-drinking utensils and admire “The Emperor’s Tea Set” from the Tang dynasty. Finally, in the “Tang Dynasty Tea Tasting” section, students experience the practice of using tea to aid reading and cultivating oneself. The teacher then has students discuss in groups and share reflections on their own country’s tea culture. The final knowledge construction can be completed in class after the exhibition visit. The teacher prepares tea utensils and demonstrates the Gongfu tea ceremony, inviting students to taste tea while discussing. Each group then presents and shares their findings, their understanding of Chinese tea culture, and compares tea-drinking customs from various countries.

Chinese wine culture has a long history and has been an essential part of people’s lives since ancient times. Wine, as a cultural symbol and social medium, not only holds rich symbolic meaning but also embodies deep historical and cultural connotations. Wine culture has a profound history not only in China but also worldwide, with each country attaching different meanings to its wine culture. Consequently, wine culture is a popular teaching topic among international students. Using museum artifacts and the museum construction model, the following teaching innovations can be applied.

The “gong” vessel appeared in the middle of the Shang dynasty and was popular until the middle of the Western Zhou dynasty as a container for holding wine. The “Riji Gong” has a square mouth with curved sides, giving it a dignified shape. Apart from the exquisitely decorated lid, the entire vessel is adorned with intricate and symmetrical patterns, divided into three layers. The first layer features a kui dragon pattern looking backward, followed by a small bird. The second layer, on the rectangular body, consists of beast face patterns with double horns curving upward and inward. The third layer, located on the ring foot of the vessel, is decorated with a band of flying birds with outspread wings. Additionally, the “Riji Gong” has an elegant handle resembling a peacock’s tail, adorned with shallow patterns in a neat, grand arrangement. Teaching wine culture to international students can be innovatively approached using the “Riji Gong” bronze vessel from the Shaanxi History Museum, applying the scaffolded teaching method under constructivist theory. Scaffolding provides a conceptual framework for learners to construct their understanding of knowledge. The new lesson is introduced by building a scaffold. According to the “zone of proximal development,” a conceptual framework is established, engaging students’ museum experiences and prior knowledge of Chinese culture. Students are encouraged to guess what this artifact might be. Once the artifact’s name is revealed, the teacher proceeds with further explanations, creating a learning context and guiding students into a specific problem situation (a node within the conceptual framework). The teacher introduces the artifact through a story of an ancient king hosting guests, prompting students to guess the purpose of the item. “Gong” is a traditional Chinese vessel for holding wine, and “Riji” is the name of the maker’s father, hence the name “Riji Gong” for this bronze artifact. Next is the independent exploration phase: photos of different sides of “Riji Gong” are displayed on a PPT, with white lines outlining the animal shapes on the vessel. The teacher explains the designs of the “fish scale,” “taotie,” and “kui dragon” motifs, encouraging students to compare and discover these features on their own. The teacher uses collaborative learning within the scaffolded teaching method, introducing the Chinese idiom “gong chou jiao cuo” (a lively drinking scene) to discuss Chinese wine culture. Finally, the teacher assigns group discussion questions for students to answer: (1) Share the wine culture of your own country; (2) If you were to attend a Chinese banquet, what would you need to be mindful of? The teacher then evaluates the responses provided by students as a measure of learning outcomes.

V. Conclusion

The museum construction model represents an innovative approach to teaching cultural courses to international students. By integrating the construction model with museum resources, it allows international and overseas students to experience “living,” “tangible,” and “multi-level” cultural content. This approach not only enables students to use the language flexibly but also provides them with a deeper understanding of Chinese culture, helping to prevent cross-cultural misunderstandings. This paper combines constructivist theory with the educational function of museums, diversifying both the teaching model and content for cultural courses aimed at international students. By presenting “living” and “three-dimensional” cultural content, this approach increases the students’ interest in learning about Chinese culture. The overall goal of teaching cultural courses to international students is to enable learners from diverse cultural backgrounds to understand Chinese behaviors and values, fostering effective communication with Chinese people. In the museum construction model for international cultural courses, students not only gain an understanding of Chinese culture but also improve their language expression and deepen their comprehension and application of cultural knowledge through group work,

discussions, and interactive exchanges. The innovative teaching design presented in this paper is derived from reflections on real teaching practices with international students. The “Wine Culture in Gong Chou Jiao Cuo” lesson has already been tested in class with positive feedback from students. Additionally, the study of constructivist theory and museum artifact resources in this paper is not yet comprehensive, necessitating further exploration. Continuous practice will be required in future teaching to better integrate cultural courses for international students with the museum construction model.

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