



A Study on the International Teaching Practice of Zhoushan's Intangible Cultural Heritage from the Perspective of Intercultural Communication

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Abstract. This study adopts cross-cultural communication theory as its analytical framework to explore effective pathways for integrating Zhoushan's intangible cultural heritage(ICH) into international classrooms. By analyzing key processes such as intercultural communication and cultural adaptation, the study proposes that Business English majors serve as a communicative bridge to transform local ICH into teaching content that is culturally accessible to international learners. The findings indicate that, through well-designed curricular modules, experiential pedagogical approaches, and digital communication strategies, Zhoushan's ICH can function as an effective vehicle for cultural transmission in international classrooms, while also providing Business English students with valuable opportunities to engage in intercultural communication practice.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage; Intercultural Communication; International Classroom; Digital Communication

1 Introduction

In today's era of deepening globalization, the protection and transmission of cultural diversity have become a shared concern worldwide. As stated in UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, intangible cultural heritage (ICH) represents one of the most vibrant components of cultural diversity. An understanding of different communities' ICH facilitates intercultural dialogue and encourages mutual respect for other ways of life^[1]. At the same time, international education is shifting from a narrow focus on language teaching toward deeper cultural understanding. More and more educators recognize that developing intercultural competence requires genuinely enhancing cultural inclusion and adaptation, moving beyond surface-level cultural knowledge to explore traditional wisdom and values in depth. Against this backdrop, introducing distinctive ICH into international classrooms represents a promising new approach to the dissemination of cultural heritage.

The ICH of Zhoushan not only serves as a living carrier of the region's maritime culture but also possesses the foundations for intercultural communication due to the universal emotions and aesthetic values it embodies. Take the Putuo Guanyin Cake for

example, developed and passed down over thousands of years, it bears witness to the historical evolution of Mount Putuo in Zhoushan and is a living piece of cultural heritage. In 2023, the craft of making Guanyin Cake was inscribed on the seventh batch of Zhoushan Municipal Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The themes of “compassion” and “gratitude” embedded within it represent universal human emotions. Therefore, integrating Zhoushan’s ICH into international classrooms can not only open up new spaces for transmitting this unique island culture but also provide international students with a window into the diverse cultures of China.

1.1 Practical Experiences in Intercultural Communication of Zhoushan’s Intangible Cultural Heritage

In recent years, rich practical experience has been gained in the intercultural communication of Zhoushan’s intangible cultural heritage (ICH). For example, in the field of Putuo gyotaku, ICH inheritor Xu Binli appeared on the global stage of a UNESCO-themed Spring Festival Gala, where he demonstrated this unique craft, which originated from fishermen during the Song Dynasty. In the field of Zhoushan paper cutting, Chen Shiding, inheritor of Shengsi marine paper cutting, joined a cultural exchange delegation of Zhejiang paper-cutting artists on a tour to Europe. He brought his marine-themed works to Paris, leaving a trace of Shengsi’s maritime art along the Seine. At the same time, Chen has years of experience teaching marine paper cutting to international students in China, and his teaching practice has provided great value for bringing ICH into international classrooms.

The intercultural dissemination of Zhoushan’s ICH is not carried out by a single actor, but relies on multi-party collaboration. Local universities in Zhoushan have actively explored ways to internationalize ICH, accumulating practical experience for building ICH-based international classrooms. According to reports from relevant universities, some schools of foreign languages have proposed the idea that “foreign language professionals should not only serve as a bridge for cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries, but also act as guardians and disseminators of local culture.” Through ICH workshops and similar activities, they have planted the seeds of ICH protection and transmission among foreign language students and international faculty, successfully finding an effective path for “bringing ICH to campus”. The ongoing success of such activities provides organizational models that can be used to normalize ICH-based international classrooms.

1.2 Challenges in the Intercultural Communication of Zhoushan's Intangible Cultural Heritage

As a product of a high-context cultural background, the essential meaning of Zhoushan's intangible cultural heritage (ICH) requires a certain cultural context to be fully understood, which poses the primary challenge to its international communication. The teaching of ICH often includes hands-on activities, but lacks language training and cultural interpretation, reducing cultural education to mere skill practice while neglecting the construction of meaning^[2]. A survey on Shengsi marine paper cutting conducted

among 160 international students in China from 21 countries shows that 82% of them had no prior knowledge of marine paper cutting before learning it. After the course, 42.5% expressed strong liking for it, and 26.8% liked it moderately^[3]. This appreciation remains at a relatively superficial level, with insufficient understanding of the culture behind it, thus failing to achieve precise communication. Still taking Shengsi paper cutting as an example: in Chinese culture, paper-cut patterns are often associated with auspicious meanings. For instance, “fish” (yu) represents “abundance year after year” (nian nian you yu), and “seagulls” symbolize “peace and good fortune”. These meanings are embedded in marine motifs through techniques such as homophones and metaphors. For international audiences unfamiliar with Chinese cultural symbols, such meanings often go unnoticed and are therefore ignored.

Every time people from different cultural backgrounds interact, they decide which mode of communication to adopt. The choice of a preferred mode depends on their personal values^[4]. Therefore, the intercultural communication of ICH requires interdisciplinary talents who have both a deep understanding of ICH and the ability to communicate it effectively. The shortage of such talent is another factor that bottlenecks ICH communication. Generally speaking, many ICH inheritors are relatively old and have limited intercultural communication competence, resulting in less smooth interactions with international students and thus hindering cultural transmission. At the same time, those who possess strong language and international communication skills often lack sufficient knowledge of ICH and a sense of cultural identity. This gap highlights the potential value of Business English majors, who have advantages in language ability, intercultural awareness, and international business knowledge, and can play a key role in the international communication of culture. Through systematic learning of ICH knowledge and hands-on practice, they can grow into cultural translators and communicators.

Although Zhoushan's intangible cultural heritage (ICH) has been introduced to international audiences through various ways, the scale and effectiveness of its dissemination still require improvement. The appearance of the Putuo gyotaku inheritor at the Spring Festival Gala represents a successful breakthrough in bringing Zhoushan's culture to the international stage. However, how to transform this success into sustained momentum remains an ongoing question that needs continuous exploration. Regarding communication channels, while attempts have been made to utilize short-video platforms and social media, these efforts remain at an early stage of development, and their influence needs to be further enhanced. How to better integrate ICH into the lives of international audiences and achieve in-depth international teaching is an urgent issue that must be addressed. This study, grounded in intercultural communication theory, aims to explore effective pathways for bringing Zhoushan's ICH into international classrooms, thereby providing a reference for the international educational dissemination of local ICH.

2 Theoretical Basis

Edward Hall, an American anthropologist, noted in his work *Beyond Culture* that in

high context cultures, communication relies more on the shared cultural background and situational context between the interacting parties, with less use of explicit verbal codes. In contrast, low context cultures depend mainly on language (explicit codes), to convey meaning directly. In such cases, explicit codes carry a large amount of information and rely less on underlying context^[5]. This theory provides an important perspective for understanding meaning construction in cultural communication. Zhoushan's intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is deeply embedded in the soil of Chinese culture and is a typical product of a high context culture within its local environment, requiring a specific cultural background to be fully understood. When these ICH items are introduced into international classrooms, they essentially move from a high context setting to a communication environment that is multicultural and relatively low context. International students come from different cultural backgrounds and lack shared knowledge of Zhoushan's culture. Consequently, the transmission of the essential meanings of ICH is bound to face significant challenges, and some loss of cultural information is inevitable.

Therefore, bringing Zhoushan's ICH into international classrooms is a process of contextual reconstruction. Students from different cultural backgrounds will interpret ICH content based on their own cognitive frameworks. Thus, cross cultural teaching of ICH needs to be designed in an explicit and contextualized manner, tailored to the cognitive characteristics of students from various cultural backgrounds. This approach helps supply basic cultural knowledge for those students, transforming cultural connotations that seem "only to be sensed" into something that "can be conveyed in words".

3 Practical Pathways for Bringing Zhoushan's Intangible Cultural Heritage into International Classrooms

Building on the preceding analysis of Edward Hall's high and low-context cultural theory, this chapter focuses on the design of practical pathways for international ICH teaching. Hall's theory reveals the challenge of "loss of meaning" that ICH faces when it enters an international, low-context environment. Therefore, the primary task of the practical pathways is not to teach the skills directly, but to consciously reconstruct the context. This means designing explicit instruction that supplies the cultural background which international students lack. Moreover, students from different cultural backgrounds possess diverse cognitive frameworks. Consequently, the design of teaching content and methods must take into account the specific reception characteristics of a multicultural audience. Guided by this theoretical framework, the international teaching curriculum for Zhoushan's ICH can be organized into three interrelated modules: cultural decoding, hands-on experience of skills, and digital innovation. These three modules function respectively to explain, internalize and extend the context, thereby forming a complete cycle from loss of meaning to contextual reconstruction.

3.1 Cultural Decoding

The objective of the first module is to address the problem of "missing context" in

intercultural communication. Learning ICH skills is inherently challenging. Traditional teaching often focuses on enhancing their hands-on experience. However, such an approach is far from sufficient if the goal is to help students genuinely understand ICH culture through learning. Take Putuo Guanyin Cake as an example. Teaching in this module can be structured into three progressive levels to build a cognitive framework for cultural understanding:

(1) Basic cultural level: The focus is on making explicit the cultural meanings embedded in the high-context environment. By explaining the origin of Guanyin Cake and the legendary story of baking cakes to relieve famine, students are guided to understand the underlying values of gratitude and sharing. Simple, vivid language combined with visual materials helps reduce language barriers and enables students to establish initial cognition.

(2) Local cultural level: The focus is on connecting ICH with the local environment, transforming it from an abstract cultural symbol into a tangible regional expression. Introducing local ingredients such as seaweed used in Guanyin Cake helps students learn about Zhoushan from the perspective of local products, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of maritime culture.

(3) Cultural symbol level: The focus is on making explicit the symbolic meanings embedded in traditional Chinese culture. Students are guided to observe auspicious patterns on Guanyin Cake, such as the character “Fu” (blessing) and lotus flowers, while the cultural connotations behind these patterns are explained. Comparisons with Western holiday baking traditions, such as Christmas gingerbread men, help lower the cognitive threshold.

3.2 Hands-on Experience of Skills

According to Hall's theory, immersive situational experience is itself an effective means of “contextual reconstruction”. Through direct practice, ICH often transforms from an abstract cultural symbol into tangible, embodied memory. ICH programs at relevant universities have all included hands-on components, and authentic feedback from many participants indicates that immersive skill experiences can effectively stimulate international students' emotional identification with ICH. Drawing on similar teaching practices, this module can be designed as follows:

(1) Simplified instruction of basic skills: Complex techniques are broken down into relatively simple core steps. This makes the instruction more aligned with the need for clear, direct information among students from low-context cultural backgrounds, while avoiding excessive simplification that might lead to cultural loss.

(2) Multimodal teaching support: Students from different cultural backgrounds exhibit systematic differences in learning styles. Those from high uncertainty avoidance cultures require clear, complete operational guidance, whereas students from low uncertainty avoidance cultures are more adapted to exploratory learning. This part of the module should provide diversified learning supports. For example, while the teacher performs a live demonstration, illustrated, multilingual instructional handbooks are provided to further lower language barriers.

(3) Themed creation: International students are guided to incorporate elements of their own cultures into their creations, achieving cultural integration. This not only demonstrates the flexibility of ICH but also helps students establish an emotional bond with it.

3.3 Digital Innovation

Digital means can transcend the limitations of time and space, expanding the coverage and influence of ICH communication. Generally speaking, most young people overseas have high adaptability and receptivity to new things, making digital and intelligent emerging media suitable channels for this audience^[6]. After the hands-on skill experience, how can students' sense of engagement be refined and enriched? Based on this question, this module is designed as follows:

(1) Digital portfolio: A personal digital project page is created for each student, including photos of their finished work. Students can add their own project descriptions and design their project pages themselves. These portfolios can later be shared publicly on social media platforms. When students share their portfolios on social media, they transform from passive cultural learners into active cultural communicators.

(2) AR-enhanced artwork narration: Taking Zhoushan embroidery as an example, students may choose to record a video explaining their work. Using simple AR tools and AI technology, when students scan their own embroidery pieces, the recorded video and a dynamic animation of the embroidery appear. This design serves two purposes. First, it increases the interactivity of the ICH work, attracting the attention of younger audiences. Second, the video narration compensates for the cultural information that static works struggle to convey, enabling another transformation from high-context to low-context communication.

4 Conclusion

This study argues that although Zhoushan's intangible cultural heritage faces certain obstacles in international communication due to its high-context cultural characteristics, its embedded universal values and the successful practices of local universities demonstrate its intercultural potential. The exploration of bringing Zhoushan's ICH into international classrooms is, in essence, a self-presentation of local culture on the global stage, as well as a process of encounter and dialogue between different cultures. In this process, we need both the cultural confidence to appreciate our own beauty and the wisdom to appreciate shared beauty.

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