

Current Situation, Problems and Optimization Paths of Thesis Topic Selection in Cultural Teaching for Master's Degree in International Chinese Language Education: An Empirical Analysis based on CNKI from 2019-2023

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Abstract: The topic selection of master's degree theses in cultural teaching within international Chinese language education is a significant indicator of practical and theoretical development in this field. This study uses literature analysis, data statistics, and SATI tools to analyze 727 cultural teaching theses collected by China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) from 2019 to 2023, focusing on two dimensions: topic directions (teaching objectives, content, methods, country-specific research) and types (teaching experiment reports, teaching designs, etc.). The study found that existing topics are highly concentrated on classroom practice research (67.3%), showing a prominent feature of "strong practical orientation and insufficient theoretical construction". Research methods mainly rely on empirical analysis (82.1%), but there are core problems such as homogenization of topic selection, fragmentation of country-specific research, and lack of interdisciplinary integration. Based on this, this paper proposes optimizing paths from balancing topic directions, strengthening systematic country-specific research, and integrating interdisciplinary methods to promote innovation and practicality in cultural teaching research, providing references for the professional and localized development of international Chinese language education.

Keywords: Master's in International Chinese Language Education, Cultural Teaching, Thesis Topic Selection, Optimization of Topic Selection, Interdisciplinary Research.

1. Introduction

International Chinese language education serves as a two-way bridge for language dissemination and cultural exchange, with its cultural teaching being both an auxiliary tool for language acquisition and a core carrier for cultivating cross-cultural communication skills (Li Baogui, 2021). With the advancement of the "Belt and Road" initiative, the number of global Chinese learners continues to grow. Ministry of Education data shows that by 2023, more than 180 countries have introduced Chinese courses, with overseas Chinese learners surpassing 150 million. Against this backdrop, the importance of cultural teaching has become increasingly prominent, requiring research to balance language proficiency enhancement and cultural value transmission. However, existing studies indicate that master's degree theses in international Chinese language education suffer from issues such as concentrated topic selection and lack of innovation (Qi Haifeng, 2015). Although cultural teaching topics occupy a certain proportion, their uniqueness and systematic nature have not been fully explored. For instance, Liang Li (2021) found that cultural teaching papers account for only 12.6% of all master's theses in international Chinese language education, mostly focusing on teaching methods and textbook analysis, lacking in-depth exploration of cultural dissemination mechanisms. Based on this, this study focuses on the following questions: Current situation and characteristics: What are the distribution patterns and core features of topic selection in cultural teaching theses? Existing problems: What are the key contradictions in terms of direction, method, and theory in topic selection? Optimization paths: How can topic planning improve the academic value and practical significance of research?

2. Literature Review

Current research often examines topic types and methods from a statistical perspective. For example, Qian Yunke (2022) used CiteSpace tools to analyze that topic selections in master's theses of international Chinese language education are concentrated in practical areas such as "teaching methods" and "textbook design", while theoretical issues like "cultural cognitive differences" and "interdisciplinary integration" account for less than 5%. Qi Haifeng (2015) further points out that cultural teaching papers often fall into the dilemma of "emphasizing cases over mechanisms", remaining at the level of summarizing teaching strategies rather than exploring the rules of cultural dissemination.

Notably, cultural teaching topics have gradually shown a trend towards "country-specific" focus in recent years. Zhang Shaoyun's (2021) survey of universities in Shanghai revealed that Southeast Asian countries (such as Thailand, Vietnam) have become hotspots of research, accounting for 55%, but such research mainly focuses on comparisons of teaching methods in single countries, failing to form a theoretical framework for regional cultural teaching.

Cultural teaching needs to balance the dual goals of "cultural popularization" and "in-depth interpretation" (Zhou Xiaobing, 2019). On one hand, superficial cultural symbols (such as food, festivals, films) due to their intuitiveness and interest become the preferred carriers for teaching practices; on the other hand, the transmission of deep cultural values (such as collectivism, harmony concepts) requires reliance on systematic theoretical construction. However, existing topics tend to focus on the former. For instance, Li Li (2022) found that 78% of cultural teaching papers use "short videos" and "ancient poetry" as entry points, while research on cultural

cognitive differences or cross-cultural adaptation accounts for less than 10%.

This contradiction reflects a structural shortcoming in cultural teaching research: overly strong practical orientation and insufficient theoretical innovation. How to break through the limitations of superficial cultural dissemination and construct a "language-culture-society" trinity research framework has become an urgent academic proposition.

3. Research Methods

(1) Data Source

This study uses 727 master's theses related to cultural teaching in international Chinese language education collected by China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) from 2019 to 2023 as initial samples. Through manual screening, duplicate documents, non-relevant literature (such as pure linguistic research), and incomplete data documents were excluded, resulting in 678 valid samples. These samples cover 32 provincial-level administrative regions, 197 universities, and include six types of thesis categories: teaching experiment reports, teaching designs, thematic

studies, survey reports, case analyses, and others.

The analytical framework was constructed based on two dimensions:

Topic Directions: Teaching Objectives: Hierarchical Design for Cultural Competence Cultivation (e.g., Basic Cultural Perception, Advanced Cultural Interpretation)

Teaching Objectives: Hierarchical design for cultural competence cultivation (e.g., basic cultural perception, advanced cultural interpretation).

Teaching Content: Superficial culture (films, festivals) vs. deep culture (values, cognitive models).

(2) Teaching Methods

Empirical methods (questionnaire surveys), mixed methods (experiments + interviews), interdisciplinary methods (educational psychology, digital humanities).

Country-specific Research: Regional distribution, cultural dissemination mechanisms.

(3) Topic Types: According to the "Guidelines for Writing Master's Theses in International Chinese Language Education", the thesis types are divided into six categories (see Table 1).

Table 1. Classification Standards for Topic Types

Type	Definition & Examples
Teaching Experiment Reports	Verify the effectiveness of cultural teaching strategies through experiments (e.g., "Cultural Immersion Teaching Experiment Based on VR Technology").
Teaching Designs	Design complete cultural teaching plans (e.g., "Design of a Cultural Unit Lesson under the 'Belt and Road' Theme").
Thematic Studies	Focus on specific cultural issues for theoretical analysis (e.g., "Research on Cultural Conflicts in Cross-cultural Adaptation").
Survey Reports	Analyze the current situation of cultural teaching based on field surveys (e.g., "Research on the Implementation of Cultural Courses in Thai Primary and Secondary Schools").
Case Analyses	In-depth analysis of typical teaching cases (e.g., "Audience Feedback Analysis of Confucius Institute Cultural Activities").
Others	Hybrid or unclassified research

Analytical Tools: The SATI bibliometric analysis tool (SATI 4.0) was used to extract high-frequency words from the titles and abstracts of papers, generating word clouds (see Figure 1) to visually present hot topics. Excel was also used for cross-tabulation to analyze the correlation between topic directions and types.

4. Research Results

(1) Characteristics of Topic Directions

Dominance of Teaching Content (39.2%): Superficial cultural carriers account for the highest proportion, with film resources (27%), poetry songs (18%), and regional cultures (15%) being the main research objects; deep cultural studies (such as value teaching) account for only 6%, often attached to language courses without independent theoretical frameworks.

Fragmented Country-specific Research: Southeast Asian countries account for 55% (Thailand 71%, Vietnam 12%), but research themes focus on "textbook comparisons" and "classroom observations", lacking systematic exploration of cultural dissemination mechanisms (e.g., localization strategies, policy impacts); European and American region research (18%) focuses on "cross-cultural conflicts", but sample sizes are insufficient, limiting the generalizability of conclusions.

Weak Quantitative Research: Only 3% of papers adopt mixed research methods (e.g., "questionnaire surveys +

experimental tracking"), while 82% rely on single empirical methods, leading to inadequate depth of data.

(2) Distribution of Topic Types Practical Category Dominance: Teaching experiment reports (34%) and teaching designs (29%) have the highest proportions, reflecting the discipline's emphasis on applied value; Theoretical Category Insufficiency: Thematic studies (20%) and case analyses (2%) have low proportions, mostly focusing on textbook analysis without addressing core contradictions in cultural teaching.

(3) High-Frequency Word Analysis

The SATI word cloud shows that "teaching design", "cultural factors", and "teaching strategies" are core keywords (frequency > 200). Secondary keywords include "country-specific", "film resources", and "cross-cultural" (frequency 50-150). This distribution confirms the practical orientation of topic selection (see Figure 1).

5. Discussion

(1) Existing Problems

Homogenization Dilemma: Overconcentration in popular areas, such as "short video teaching" related papers increased by 120% from 2021 to 2023, but most repeat the fixed paradigm of "resource integration - classroom application - effect evaluation", lacking methodological innovation; misuse of subtitles is significant, with "***research -- taking...as an example" accounting for 37%, but case selection tends to be similar (such as Li Ziqi's short videos,

HSK textbooks), weakening the uniqueness of research.

Monotonous Methodology: 82% of papers use questionnaire surveys, but questionnaire designs often borrow templates from predecessors, lacking reliability and validity testing; longitudinal tracking studies (such as cross-semester cultural competence development) account for less than 1%, making it difficult to reveal dynamic changes in teaching outcomes.

Insufficient Depth of Country-specific Research: Southeast Asian studies focus on Thailand, but mostly remain at the level of "classroom strategy comparisons", failing to combine regional cultural characteristics (such as Buddhist cultural influence) to build theoretical models; papers on emerging Chinese learning regions like Africa and Latin America account for less than 5%, and are mostly written by non-local students, raising doubts about the authenticity of field data.

(2) Optimization Paths

Topic Innovation: Explore emerging fields such as "cultural cognitive neuroscience" and "digital humanities technology". For instance, eye-tracking experiments can analyze attention allocation for cultural symbols, or AI technology can be used to construct intelligent recommendation systems for cultural teaching.

Deep Cultural Issues: Focus on theoretical propositions such as "construction of cultural identity" and "mediation of value conflicts", promoting the transformation of research from "instrumentality" to "constructiveness".

Method Integration: Advocate for mixed research methods combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, such as adding interviews and ethnographic observations in experimental design to enhance the three-dimensionality and universality of conclusions; introduce longitudinal tracking and cross-cultural comparisons, e.g., comparing the teaching effects of the same cultural theme in Europe-America and Southeast Asia.

Practical Collaboration: Establish a topic selection cooperation mechanism between universities and overseas institutions, encouraging students to participate in long-term practices of Confucius Institutes or localization projects to obtain first-hand field data; build a "cultural teaching case database" integrating high-quality teaching designs and cross-cultural conflict cases to provide standardized references for topic selection.

6. Conclusion

This study reveals the practical orientation and theoretical shortcomings of topic selection in master's degree theses on cultural teaching in international Chinese language education. Although current research has achieved fruitful results in teaching methods and resource development, structural problems such as homogenization, fragmentation, and monotonous methodology persist. Future efforts should focus on three aspects:

Theoretical Deepening: Construct a cognitive science

framework for cultural teaching, exploring the interaction mechanisms between language acquisition and cultural identity.

Methodological Innovation: Promote the deep integration of interdisciplinary tools (such as big data, virtual reality) with cultural teaching.

Practical Collaboration: Strengthen international cooperation, establish regionalized cultural teaching databases, and facilitate the localized application of research outcomes.

Cultural teaching research should not be limited to "how to teach", but also needs to address deeper questions such as "why to teach" and "what is the effectiveness of teaching". Only by balancing practice and theory, local and global perspectives, tradition and innovation, can we elevate international Chinese language education from "language dissemination" to the higher dimension of "civilizational exchange".

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