

International Chinese language education from the perspective of postmodernism

YANG Fan

Beijing Language and Culture University, China



*Author

YANG Fan

Beijing Language and Culture
University, China

*Author Email:

yangfan100@blcu.edu.cn

Abstract

International Chinese Language Education is targeted at learners of Chinese as a second language and a foreign language. This paper analyzes International Chinese Language Education from the perspective of postmodernism in four major characteristics: generative, constructive, and dynamic; richness, diversity, and openness; uncertainty, chaos, and complexity; as well as fairness, holistic and systematicness. It also provides examples of International Chinese Language Education from the postmodern perspective including online education platforms such as Chinese alliance, various “Chinese + vocation” Confucius Institutes, and the possible application of metauniverse.

Keywords: postmodernism, International Chinese Language Education, online education

Introduction

According to the data from the National Bureau of Statistics of China, in 2021 the Chinese GDP has grown 8.1% compared with 2020. China remains the world's second largest economy. Chinese is one of the six official languages in the United Nations. About one-fifth of the world's population, more than 1.4 billion people in China, speaks some variety of Chinese as their native language. Since the early 2000s, the world has been in the midst of “mandarin fever”, prompted by China's growing economic power and culture influence (Gil, 2020). In the United States, it is one of the seven languages of the Language Flagship program, and is included in the AP Chinese language and culture program. The primary reasons for the “mandarin fever” include business, travel, employment, study abroad, cultural exchange, etc.

Wu (2022) points out that International Chinese Language Education mainly consists of three sections: teaching Chinese as a foreign language in China, teaching Chinese as a foreign language or a second language abroad, and overseas Chinese education. By 2019, 356,499 foreign students from 200 countries and regions have studied in 746 institutions of higher learning,

research institutes and other educational and teaching institutions in 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities in China. At the abroad level, Confucius Institute is a non-profit educational institution jointly established by universities in China and foreign countries with the aim of promoting the spread of Chinese language, deepening the understanding of Chinese language and culture in the world, promoting cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries, and enhancing international understanding. Since the first Confucius Institute established in South Korea in 2004, China has set up 550 Confucius Institutes and 1,172 Confucius classrooms in primary and secondary schools in 162 countries (and regions).

Postmodernism is a worldwide cultural trend and the product of postmodern society. It opposes absolute rationality and advocates open and interactive dialogue, compromise and diversity of interpretation (Jencks, 1987). This paper attempts to analyze the transformation of International Chinese Language Education under the COVID-19 pandemic from a postmodern perspective.

Literature Review

International Chinese Language Education

International Chinese Language Education is targeted at learners of Chinese as a second language and a foreign language. The term "International Chinese Language Education" was first put forward by Vice Premier of P.R. China, Sun Chunlan at the 2019 International Chinese Language Education Conference, marking the transformation from "Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages" to "International Chinese Language Education" and ushering in a new era of International Chinese Language Education. During the International Chinese Language Education Week 2020, Tian Xuejun, the deputy minister of education in China, mentioned that more than 70 countries around the world have incorporated Chinese Language Education into the national education systems. In addition, more than 4000 foreign universities have offered Chinese language curricula, around 25 million people learn Chinese outside China, and the accumulative number of Chinese learners are nearly 200 million (Guangming Daily, 2020). Vice Premier of China, Sun Chunlan, proposed that International Chinese Language Education should focus on language education, meet the needs of local language learners, help local Chinese teachers to build a more open, inclusive and standardized International Chinese Language Education system, and let the world know more about China.

International Chinese Language Education mainly includes eight research fields, the political, economic and cultural influence on Chinese education, the construction of International Chinese Language Education disciplinary theoretical system, the International Chinese Language Education system, teachers, textbooks, teaching methods, project management, typical cases, international communication of Chinese, the application of International Chinese Language Education technology, etc. (Wu, 2022).

Ma, Liang, Wu, and Ma (2021) point out that the development of Chinese teaching resources presents the following characteristics: the "Community of Resource Building" is basically formed, and China has become the country with the largest output of Chinese teaching resources. Chinese language textbooks have been issued to 101 countries and more than 1200 Chinese teaching institutions. Resource construction has gradually realized the transformation from quantity growth to quality improvement, from paper teaching materials to digital resources, and from single type to diversified structure. However, data showed that there are currently some limitations in the field of international Chinese language education which include the proportion of international youth learning Chinese is not high, and their mastery of Chinese language is still limited. Suggestions on solving those issues include strengthening cultural confidence and pursuing innovative development, emphasizing the cultural attributes and functions of language learning, establishing high quality international Chinese language education system, and developing international Chinese language education based on individual differences and

local conditions (Ren, 2022). The future of resource construction should adhere to the standardized guidance and accelerate the innovative development of Chinese teaching resources, optimize the teaching material system, and enhance the ability to supply high-quality teaching content.

In the future, the development of international Chinese language education depends on accelerating the integrated development of information technology and artificial intelligence; enhance the economic value of language education, strengthen the construction of "Chinese + vocational skills" and teaching resources; pay attention to the support of scientific research. International Chinese language education should expand the breadth and depth of Chinese teaching resources research; tell Chinese stories in the right way, and present a realistic, three-dimensional and comprehensive image of China (Ma, Liang, Wu, & Ma, 2021).

Postmodernism

In *The Reenchantment of Science: Postmodern Proposals*, David Griffin (1995) once divided postmodernism into deconstructive postmodernism and constructive postmodernism. Deconstructive postmodernism is characterized by skepticism and negation. It opposes any sole center, absolute foundation, pure rationality and hierarchical structure, aiming to destroy the traditional closed, simple and rigid model. The main characteristics of constructive postmodernism are constructiveness, advocating openness and equality, focusing on cultivating people to listen to others, learn from others, pay attention to others and respect others, encouraging diversified thinking styles, advocating care for the world and adopting a home-style attitude towards the world (Xiang, 2005).

The postmodern educational view is opposed to the "elite education" of modernism, the conquest of nature, the supremacy of rationality, and the problems brought by the rapid development of industrial society. Its essence can be summarized as lifelong education, subject education, and general education (Yang & Sun, 2000). The postmodern curriculum focuses on interdependence, ecology, equality, democracy, critical theory and feminism, and originates from chaos and infinite cosmology (Jiang & Zheng, 2003).

Postmodernism advocates 4R, namely richness, recursion, relevance and rigor (Doll, 2015). Richness refers to the depth of curriculum, the level of curriculum meaning, the variety of possibilities and explanations of curriculum, which is developed through metaphor, myth and narration. Recursion is the reorganization, structure and transformation of reflective experience generated by a person's self-feeling in the process of reflective interaction with the environment, others and culture. Unlike closed repetitive frameworks, recursive frameworks are open and aim to develop competencies; relevance refers to the constant search for the connection between viewpoints and meanings, and the consideration of the connection between historical and cultural backgrounds and the way of perceiving relationships (Jiang & Jiang, 2003). Finally, rigor means purposefully looking for

different options, relationships and connections (Doll, 2015).

The postmodern educational view includes humanized educational view, inquiry educational view, dialogue educational view, innovative educational view and democratic educational view (Xiang, 2005). The humanized view of education holds that both teachers and students are the subjects in teaching, while the object is the real world that needs to be understood. In teaching, teachers and students are equal, trust and cooperative with each other. The purpose of teaching is to develop students' critical thinking and creative consciousness.

The educational view of questioning believes that both teachers and students can be the proposer of problems, while the heuristic teaching of Socrates advocates teachers to propose higher order questions that can stimulate students' thinking. The educational view of dialogue requires students to think and explore by themselves. In the dialogue between teachers and students, both teachers and students should communicate equally and sincerely.

The innovative view of education holds that the purpose of education is to make students achieve self-study and critical thinking, so that they can reform and rebuild the world. Therefore, education must cultivate students' creativity and promote their positive thinking and critical consciousness. The democratic education view of postmodernism pursues democratic equality, emphasizes that educational evaluation should emphasize education with equal opportunities; advocates equal teacher-student relationship, and implements democratic and equal dialogue (Xiang, 2005).

Characteristics of International Chinese Language Education from the Perspective of Postmodernism

Generative, Constructive and Dynamic

Postmodernism holds that knowledge is constantly generated and constructed and in constant change. Postmodern educational thought believes that curriculum should not only follow the teaching of textbooks, but also incorporate the experiences of teachers and students. Students are no longer receivers of knowledge, and teachers are no longer simple carriers of knowledge, but both are explorers and discoverers of knowledge. Curriculum is jointly developed by students and teachers, the teacher-student relationship is equal, and the interaction between teachers and students forms a complete curriculum.

Curriculum cannot operate according to the established track, it is a flowing, constantly changing and generative dynamic process. It needs to be jointly constructed by learners and teachers according to the learning environment and learners' needs. Therefore, it is necessary to promote the integration of a variety of Chinese corpus into the classroom and inspire students to learn in the globalized authentic context, to achieve the transformation of single textbook learning to resource-based learning. Resources not only include textbooks and teaching aids, but also include extra-curricular reading

materials, news, videos, MOOC and other multimedia online learning resources. Regional and national trends in International Chinese Language Education make it difficult for unified standards to meet the needs of different learners and teachers. Teachers should choose appropriate learning resources for learners and even guide learners to explore learning resources suitable for themselves, which will become the trend of future Chinese language learning (Ye, 2021).

Pei and Qiu (2021) believe that online Chinese teaching is conducive to the liberation of teachers. Online Chinese teaching platform saves teaching content electronically, preserves teaching content completely, and jointly shares teaching resources, which greatly reduces the waste of teachers' human resources. At the same time, the recording and preservation of teaching data is conducive to the innovation of disciplinary research, and researchers can realize the panoramic observation and all-round description of teachers' teaching and students' learning, which will greatly promote the rapid development of disciplinary research. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the construction of teaching resources and teaching platform, provide teaching support for teachers and learning resources for students, and at the same time facilitate teaching management, so as to realize the hybrid online and offline teaching.

Chinese Plus, Global Chinese Learning Platform, Chinese Road and other online learning platforms organized by Center for Language Education and Cooperation have played important roles in digital Chinese education. For example, Chinese alliance, the platform in the form of MOOC, covers Chinese learning and Chinese test, contemporary Chinese culture and national conditions, Chinese teachers' development, "Chinese +" vocational education in areas such as online courses. Chinese alliance allows learners to study Chinese under different time zone, different geographical territories, enhance the understanding of catering, logistics, railway transportation, industrial robots, and electronic information technology in the field of Chinese language learning. The platform courses include YCT Chinese proficiency test for primary and secondary school students as well as HSK (Chinese Proficiency Test) for adults. It also includes courses in English, Russian, Spanish, French and other languages suitable for learners in different countries. There is not only general knowledge of Chinese history, but also Chinese cultural courses such as Baduanjin exercise, 24 Solar Terms, ancient poetry, intangible cultural heritage, traditional Chinese festivals, traditional Chinese medicine, and Chinese ethnic musical instruments. Online resources greatly enrich the choice of Chinese language and culture learners, which present the characteristics of course diversity.

Richness, Diversity and Openness

Postmodernism education holds that education is a complex open system with the characteristics of openness, nonlinear and imbalance. According to postmodernism, the interpretation of the world is not unitary and unidirectional, instead of being wholeness and

unity, but multi-dimensional. Therefore, in terms of evaluation methods, postmodernism advocates diversified assessment, pays attention to individual differences, as well as meets the needs of learners in different cultures.

Chinese for Specific Purposes (CSP) refer to Chinese in a specific domain or field compared with general Chinese. It caters to the current need and new model of "Chinese + vocation" with a combination of language education and vocational training. Teachers in CSP are interdisciplinary talents with skills in more than one field. The Confucius Institute for Chinese Medicine at University of the Western Cape in Cape Town, South Africa was established in November, 2019. It was the first Confucius Institute with the characteristics of Chinese medicine in Africa. This Confucius Institute not only offers Chinese language classes at universities and international schools, but also offers credit courses such as *Introduction to Chinese Medicine Terms* (Ye, 2022).

The Northern Light Confucius Institute in Iceland is another example of Confucius Institute with the characteristics of martial arts (Zhang, 2016). It is the only Confucius Institute in Iceland, and the Confucius Institute which is closest to the Arctic Circle. Since its establishment, the Northern Light Confucius Institute in Iceland has cultivated hundreds of students with skills in Chinese, martial arts, and qigong. Students in the Northern Light Confucius Institute vary from kindergartners, elementary school students, middle school and high school students, university students, to senior citizens. Apart from daily courses in Chinese language teaching and martial arts, it also holds various cultural activities during the annual "Confucius Institute Day", "Chinese Day", Iceland Independent Day, and Chinese special festivals. In addition, it expands its scope of teaching to elementary and secondary schools in Iceland as much as possible to every town and school.

Postmodernism encourages students become the participants and makers of evaluation methods, and cultivates students' individuality. It is necessary to replace repetition with regressive reflection to promote an exploratory classroom atmosphere and form an exploratory curriculum view.

Humans are essentially living systems, and living systems are essentially open systems. Therefore, only when the development of curriculum happens in the open system of education development can achieve the best results (Doll, 2015). It is necessary to expand the openness of postmodernism curriculum, let the people of all countries understand Chinese culture in the context of globalization, and oppose the centralization characteristics of the western countries. Postmodernism transcends individualism, anthropocentrism, patriarchy, consumerism, nationalism and militarism in modern society, and advocates ecological civilization (Slattery, 2013).

After the COVID-19 pandemic, all schools in China switched offline instruction to online teaching for security during the pandemic prevention and control period. The Ministry of Education in China proposed "classes suspended but learning continues". Online teaching platforms mainly include MOOC in Chinese universities,

Tencent Conference, Dingding conference, Duifenyi, Rain Classroom, Chaoxing, Zoom, etc. (Wang, 2021), while Wechat, Tik Tok, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other social media softwares can also be used to assist Chinese teaching (Wu, 2022).

The meta-universe concept, proposed by Zuckerberg in 2021, has the following three core characteristics: emphasizing the interactivity of social interaction, the immersion of simulating the real world, and the diversity of free, open and flexible rules (Cai, Jiao, & Song, 2022). The educational meta-universe is based on VR/AR technology to map the real world to a virtual learning environment with certain degree of intelligence, and extending the real life. For example, in 2021, Stanford University opened a course named "Virtual People", which was taught entirely in VR environment. As long as students carry VR headsets, they can take classes remotely anywhere. In the field of International Chinese Language Education, educational meta-universe creates the authentic social, practical, and cultural situation, which allows students to break through the space and time limit, to observe and experience the different time and locations of humanities, history, geography, and environment, and makes Chinese learning happen naturally in almost any settings.

Uncertainty, Chaos and Complexity

The problems brought by the changes of environment in macro level to International Chinese Language Education include: development direction and resource allocation caused by international political upheaval; global economic slump caused by the shortage of funds and shrinking of market problems. There are also difficulties of international understanding caused by prominent social and cultural differences; digital divide and man-machine relationship caused by accelerated technological change (Wang, 2021). Coping strategies for macro-level environmental changes of international Chinese language education include: attaching importance to crisis management, strengthening market operation, focusing on language education and integration of modern technology (Wang, 2021).

The micro level problems of online Chinese teaching mainly include: lack of information literacy of teachers, insufficient participation of learners, limited teaching mode, incomplete teaching platform, difficulty in teaching management and so on. At the micro level, the strategies for Chinese online teaching include: improving teachers' information literacy, enhancing learners' initiative, optimizing teaching mode, upgrading teaching platform, strengthening teaching management and service, etc. To solve these problems, we should improve the information literacy of Chinese teachers and enhance their ability to use online teaching platforms and software, urge teachers to publish students' homework online, build online Chinese teaching resources, and establish (cloud) learning practice community (Wang, 2021).

Postmodernism curriculum advocates decentralization, strongly advocates the elimination of boundaries between disciplines, integration of multidisciplinary knowledge, and advocates that

curriculum should be regardless of subject. In the field of International Chinese Language Education, the talent training mode of "Chinese + vocations" focuses on cultivating multi-disciplinary language talents. It highlights the educational attributes of International Chinese Language Education, integrates the professional knowledge of Chinese language and literature and pedagogy, and better serves the diverse learners in terms of teaching method.

Fairness, Holistic and Systematicness

There is still a digital divide between Chinese learners in the world and their host countries, and there are still great differences between Chinese learners in developed countries and those in developing countries in terms of Chinese learning resources, teachers, textbooks and other hardware and software facilities.

Confucius Institute at Egerton University is the fourth Confucius Institute in Kenya, which is also the first Confucius Institute with agricultural characteristics in the world. It was established in 2013 and later encountered some difficulties including shortage of Chinese teachers, teachers lack of ability in teaching agricultural contents, serious loss of students, incomplete facilities in culture and sports, local people's misunderstanding of cultural exchanges between China and Africa, as well as lack of scientific cooperation in agricultural technology (Wang, 2017).

In comparison, the Tourism Confucius Institute at Griffith University is the only tourism Confucius Institute in the world. The director of this Tourism Confucius Institute is an internationally renowned sinologist Colin Mackerras, who has been positively engaged in enhancing bilateral relations between China and Australia for a long term. Since its establishment, it has become the most active and energetic cultural exchange and interaction platform. It opens a new model of tourism characteristics, carries out Chinese instruction and spreads Chinese culture. Its curriculum design targets at tourism practitioners. Based on Australia's special tourism resources, it cultivates tourism management talents with international horizons (Zhang & Tong, 2019).

It is important to make full use of the opportunity of the construction of the International Chinese Language Education online resource platform to reduce the problem of resource inequality and inadequacy among learners worldwide. Postmodernism advocates opposing anthropocentrism and western centralism, and advocates that education should pay attention to marginal groups, minorities and the lower class. This is aligned with the aim of International Chinese Language Education which focuses on Chinese learning in developing countries.

Conclusion

Under the circumstances of "profound changes unseen in a century" and "a pandemic once in a century", the development of International Chinese Language Education is facing serious challenges. International Chinese Language Education is a complex and dynamic

system with diverse cultures, a variety of fields and rapid changes. Language education is a reflection of the international political and economic pattern. It is important to adopt a holistic thinking and analyze this cause from a global perspective and a higher level (Wang, 2021).

This research project is supported by Science Foundation of Beijing Language and Culture University (supported by "the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities") (Approval number: 21YJ210009).

References

- Cai, S., Jiao, X.Y., & Song, B.J. (2022). Open another gate to Education-Application, challenge and prospect of educational meta verse, *Modern Educational Technology*, 32(1), 16-26.
- Doll, W.E. (2015). *A postmodern perspective on curriculum*. Beijing: Educational Science Publishing House.
- Doll, W.E. (2015). *Postmodern and complex pedagogy*. Beijing: Beijing Normal University Publishing Group.
- Gil, J. (2020). Will a character based writing system stop Chinese becoming a global language? A review and reconsideration of the debate. *Global Chinese*, 6(1), 25-48. <https://doi.org/10.1515/glochi-2020-0001>
- Griffen, D.R. (1995). *The re-enchantment of science: Postmodern proposals*, State University of New York Press.
- Jencks, C. (1987). *What is post-modernism?* (2nd enlarged, rev. ed.) New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Jiang, Y., & Zheng, F.X. (2003). Knowledge status in postmodernism and its impact on the changes of educational beliefs, *Studies in Foreign Education*, (12): 19-22.
- Jiang, Y., & Jiang, K. (2001). Curriculum development in the postmodern perspective, *Comparative Education Review*, (8), 1-5.
- Ma, J.F., Liang, Y., Wu, Y.H., & Ma, J.N. (2021). Seventy years of construction of International Chinese Language teaching resources: Achievements and prospects. *Journal of Tianjin Normal University (Social Sciences)*, 279(6), 15-22.
- Ren, S. (2022). International Chinese Language Education: Open up new environments, build new platforms and embrace new customers. *China's Foreign Trade*, (2), 73-75.
- Slattery, P. (2013). *Curriculum development in the postmodern era*. New York: Routledge.
- Wang, C.H. (2021). International Chinese Language Education experiencing the great historical changes in the perspective of language and state governance. *Journal of Yunnan Normal University (Humanities and Social Sciences)*. 53(2), 50-63.
- Wang, H. (2021). International Chinese Language Education under the influence of COVID-19 pandemic: Issues and strategies, *Language Teaching and Linguistic Studies*, (4), 11-22.
- Wang, J. (2017). The present situations and suggestions about Confucius Institute at Egerton University with agricultural characteristics. [Master's Dissertation]. Yunnan Normal University.
- Wu, Y.H. (2022). The new dynamics, domains, and methods of International Chinese Language Education, *Journal of Henan University (Social Science)*, 62(2), 103-110.
- Xiang, G.X. (2005). The education in the field of vision of postmodernism. *Studies in Foreign Education*, 32(181), 1-5.
- Yang, B.S., & Sun, F.W. (2000). Goal of curriculum in 21st century: Transition to postmodern education, *Journal of Beijing Normal University (Social Sciences)*, (4), 78-79.
- Ye, J. (2021). There is no universal textbook, only universal

- resources -- Some thoughts on the construction of international Chinese education resources in the new era, *International Chinese Language Education*, 6(4), 15-21.
- Ye, Y.J. (2022). A Preliminary study on the Training model of Special-purpose Chinese teachers in Confucius Institute of Chinese Medicine at Western Cape University in South Africa, *Modern Vocational Education*, (6), 148-150.
- Zhang, G.P. (2016). The implement and access of Wushu characteristic activity in Confucius Institute of Iceland. [Master's Dissertation]. Beijing Sport University.
- Zhang, X. L., & Tong, L.H. (2019).