

An Analysis of the Necessity of Establishing a Case Library for International Chinese Character Teaching*

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As an important method of practical teaching, case-based teaching has become increasingly prominent in international Chinese language education. However, the development of case-based teaching for Chinese characters remains insufficient, with limited research outcomes, making it difficult to effectively support the teaching and research of Chinese character instruction. The establishment of a case library for international Chinese character teaching can provide a wealth of teaching cases, meeting the developmental needs of international Chinese language education in the new era.

Keywords: international Chinese language education, Chinese character teaching, case library

I. Introduction

Chinese character teaching has always been a key component of international Chinese language education. As a typical logographic script, Chinese characters differ significantly from alphabetic writing systems in terms of structural form and writing rules. Moreover, the field of second language teaching lacks established theories for teaching a second writing system, making the instruction and research of Chinese characters particularly challenging. In recent years, theories and methods of database and case library construction have been introduced into the field of international Chinese language education, including the teaching of linguistic elements and culture.

The case-based teaching method was first established in 1870 by C.C. Langdell, then dean of Harvard Law School, and was mainly applied to legal education. In 1919, Wallace B. Donham, dean of Harvard Business School, continued and innovated this method, which gradually spread to other disciplines such as economics, management, and medicine. China introduced case-based teaching in the early 1980s, primarily in management education. After decades of practice and exploration, it has promoted practical teaching and research in various disciplines. In the field of international Chinese language education, research on case-based teaching has already yielded fruitful results in vocabulary, grammar, and culture teaching. However, research on case-based teaching and case library construction for Chinese characters—an essential component of international Chinese language education—remains scarce and insufficient to support teaching and research needs.

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II. Current Status of Case Library Development in International Chinese Language Education

Research on Case Libraries in International Chinese Language Education

With the continuous development of international Chinese language education, the shortage of qualified teachers has become increasingly prominent. The quantity and quality of teachers cannot meet the growing demand for Chinese language instruction overseas. To ensure sustainable development, it is essential to address the issues of teachers, teaching materials, and teaching methods—especially the issue of teachers. Pre-service teacher education often suffers from a disconnect between theory and practice, resulting in weak practical teaching abilities. Cases, which are real and typical events that include problems or dilemmas, can effectively help pre-service teachers translate theoretical knowledge into practical teaching skills.

Zhu Yong (2013) collected and analyzed 112 cases from around the world, discussing practical teaching issues. In 2015, Zhu Yong used 100 discussion questions from the book to organize debates on Sina Weibo, summarizing various viewpoints and publishing *Controversies in International Chinese Language Teaching Cases*. Ye Jun (2015) collected 41 teaching cases from dispatched Chinese teachers and volunteers, providing descriptions, discussions, and insights for each. The Secretariat of the National Committee for Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages (2016) selected cases from over 20 countries, documenting real classroom practices with expert analysis and commentary. The Confucius Institute Headquarters and Hanban (2018) compiled 118 teaching cases from diverse global contexts, offering in-depth analysis. Additionally, institutions such as the Online Confucius Institute, Minzu University of China, and Xiamen University have developed online case libraries for international Chinese language education.

Some scholars have also explored the theoretical and practical aspects of case-based teaching and resource development. Qi Hua (2011) discussed the characteristics and writing standards of cross-cultural communication cases; Lü Yuhui (2011) summarized the positive role of case-based teaching in improving students' cross-cultural communicative competence; Li Haiou and Zhou Qionghua (2011) explored the use of different types of teaching cases; Yang Qing (2013) examined the necessity of constructing a case library from a macro perspective; Yan Jingjing (2015) analyzed the shortcomings of the case library at Minzu University and proposed optimization strategies. Duan Yanan (2024) compares the successful and advanced application of case teaching methods in domestic disciplines such as economics, management, and law with international Chinese education disciplines.

Research on Chinese Character Teaching Cases

Although some progress has been made in case-based teaching in international Chinese language education, research specifically focused on Chinese character teaching cases remains limited. Such cases are often scattered throughout general Chinese teaching case studies, lacking a dedicated case library or comprehensive resource, which hinders the development of teachers' practical skills and the overall advancement of Chinese character instruction.

Zhu Yong (2013) dedicated a chapter to Chinese character teaching in *International Chinese Language Teaching Cases and Analysis*, collecting 12 cases related to introductory Chinese character teaching, stroke and radical instruction, Chinese character culture, and integration of characters, words, and sentences. In 2015, Zhu

Yong included 10 Chinese character teaching cases in *Controversies in International Chinese Language Teaching Cases*, discussing practical problems, conflicting viewpoints, and theoretical perspectives. Li Lili (2017) documented three Chinese character teaching cases and conducted post-teaching surveys. Zhang Huanhuan (2018) analyzed a Chinese character teaching case by a Chinese teacher in the U.S. and offered suggestions for overcoming students' psychological barriers. Wang Xiaoqing (2020) focused on Chinese character writing instruction, analyzing teaching methods and content. Wang Xi (2021) compared online and offline Chinese character teaching cases. Li Yanxin (2021) examined stroke and component teaching cases, as well as phono-semantic compound teaching cases, analyzing issues in one-on-one online instruction and offering recommendations.

Despite these efforts, the overall number of Chinese character teaching cases remains small, and the scale of case libraries is limited, with insufficient openness and accessibility. These shortcomings fail to meet the rapidly growing needs of international Chinese character instruction.

III. The Necessity of Constructing a Case Library for International Chinese Character Teaching

Chinese character teaching is both a key focus and a major challenge in international Chinese education. For learners from non-Chinese-character cultural backgrounds, the logographic and square-shaped characters differ fundamentally from the alphabetic writing systems they are familiar with. If teachers fail to effectively explain the form, sound, and meaning of characters or help learners build a cognitive framework for the structural system of Chinese characters, students may resort to rote memorization and mechanical copying strategies.

The Uniqueness and Richness of Chinese Character Teaching Content

(1) Uniqueness of Chinese Characters. Chinese characters are square-shaped morpho-syllabic symbols that integrate form, sound, and meaning. As logographs, they differ significantly from phonetic writing systems. For Chinese teachers and volunteers working overseas, effectively teaching characters to learners from non-Chinese-character cultural backgrounds to have a correct understanding and knowledge of Chinese characters, and to master this writing system, requires drawing on both accumulated pedagogical wisdom and their own classroom experience.

(2) Richness of Teaching Content. The scope of Chinese character instruction encompasses both external structures and internal configurations, as well as cultural dimensions. Learners need to grasp not only the external form of characters but also the internal principles of their composition. Specifically, this includes knowledge of strokes, components, simple and compound characters, as well as the four traditional categories of character formation: pictographs, Indicative ideographs, compound ideographs, and phono-semantic compounds. Additionally, the diachronic evolution of ideographs and their cultural implications are integral to a Chinese character curriculum.

(3) Order within Change. Chinese characters are the only ancient writing system still in continuous use today. Each character can serve as a standalone case or micro-lesson, enabling learners to master the historical development and evolution of the script through teaching cases of Chinese characters.

Training International Chinese Language Teachers

Chinese characters are the written form of the Chinese language and an indispensable section to developing learners' reading and writing proficiency. Character instruction is thus a decisive factor in improving the overall efficiency of international Chinese language education.

Teacher development is essential for the sustainable growth of international Chinese language education. The 2009 *Guidelines for the Training of Full-Time Master's Students in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages* explicitly states that programs should "utilize team learning, case analysis, field research, and simulated training to ensure that graduate students encounter at least 100 different types of cases during their coursework," thereby enhancing pedagogical skills and cross-cultural adaptability.

Under the new situation of international Chinese language education, the practical ability of international Chinese teachers in teaching Chinese characters in front-line overseas Chinese teaching scenarios is particularly important. A dedicated Chinese character teaching case library can supply novice teachers with authentic, context-rich scenarios, sharpening their sensitivity to problems, their analytical rigor, and their ability to craft effective solutions.

Advancing Research on International Chinese Character Teaching

Chinese characters are the written carrier of the Chinese language. Developing international Chinese language education requires not only to conduct research on the ontological structure of Chinese characters, but also to strengthen research on international Chinese character teaching. A Chinese character teaching case is a description of a real instructional situation that contains one or more problems or dilemmas, and potentially also their solutions.

By examining the difficulties encountered by learners from diverse cultural backgrounds, researchers can identify patterns in teaching Chinese characters to international students and continuously summarize theories and methods of Chinese character teaching that are suitable for overseas teaching scenarios.

Thus, the case library serves a dual function: it is both a practical resource for teachers and a data reservoir for building a theoretically grounded, evidence-based model of international Chinese character instruction.

IV. Designing the International Chinese Character Teaching Case Library

Technical Pathway

(1) Case Collection. The collection of case materials is the foundation of building a Chinese character teaching case library. Cases should be gathered globally from multiple sources: published research articles, audio/video recordings of lessons, and first-hand teaching transcripts.

(2) Screening and Classification. The organization of case materials is an important step in the construction of a Chinese character teaching case library. Firstly, the collected international Chinese character teaching cases should be screened to ensure their authenticity, reliability, and usability; Secondly, classify according to the teaching content, and in the process of classification, text annotations should be made for the cases, including information such as number, title, author, source, and teaching content. A complete system, reasonable classification, and clear labeling of Chinese character teaching case materials can help users find relevant content.

(3) Analytical Writing. Elaborate, analyze, and study the selected cases in depth, highlight problem awareness, explore teaching problems, and focus on discussing and reflecting on the issues.

Content Modules

(1) Character strokes and stroke order cases. Stroke is the line that constitutes Chinese characters, and it is the earliest content that international students come into contact with when learning Chinese characters. In the eyes of foreign students, Chinese character strokes are more complex and different from their familiar writing system. The appearance of strokes affects the appearance of the Chinese character system and also affects the experience of international students in learning Chinese characters; The stroke order rules of Chinese characters are important reference standards for international students to correctly write Chinese characters. This section focuses on collecting teaching cases on stroke types and naming, stroke combination teaching, stroke order teaching, and other aspects.

(2) Character Component Cases. Components are character units composed of strokes used for analyzing the external structure of Chinese characters. As an important part of Chinese character structure, component teaching is an important content of Chinese character teaching for international students. This section focuses on collecting teaching cases on the classification and naming of Chinese character components, as well as the disassembly of Chinese character components.

(3) Internal Structure Cases. The internal structure of Chinese characters mainly refers to the method of character creation, which can help students understand the rationale behind the creation of Chinese characters. This section focuses on collecting teaching cases of Chinese character creation methods such as pictographic, ideographic, ideographic, and phonetic characters.

(4) Historical-Evolution Cases. Chinese characters have a long history, evolving from oracle bone inscriptions 3000 years ago to modern Chinese characters. The form and structure of Chinese characters have undergone changes, so teaching the evolution of Chinese character form can allow students to experience the historical development and evolution of Chinese character form. This section focuses on collecting teaching cases from two aspects: one is the teaching of oracle bone script, bronze inscriptions, and small seal script, and the other is the teaching of the evolution of specific Chinese character forms, which will be organized and compared for research.

(5) Cultural-Context Cases. Chinese characters have rich cultural connotations, and their theory of character construction and changes in form reflect the lives and consciousness of our ancestors, as well as the development and changes of related things. This section focuses on collecting teaching cases related to Chinese characters and astronomy, Chinese characters and daily life, Chinese characters and clothing, Chinese characters and diet, etc.

V. Conclusion

Chinese characters are an important carrier of Chinese culture, and international Chinese character teaching is an important component of international Chinese language education. Case teaching, as an important method of practical teaching, can demonstrate the complexity of actual teaching problems in international Chinese classrooms, help improve teachers' sensitivity to discovering problems, scientific analysis of problems, and initiative and creativity in solving problems in teaching practice.

The construction of an international Chinese character teaching case library can provide rich teaching cases for Chinese character teaching, meet the development needs of international Chinese language education in the new era, and play a positive role in international Chinese language education.

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