

INTERDISCIPLINARITY AND INDUSTRY-EDUCATION INTEGRATION OF CHINESE LANGUAGE PROGRAMS IN MEXICAN UNIVERSITIES—A CASE STUDY OF SOUTHERN AND CENTRAL UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract:

This research focuses on Chinese language education at the consortium of universities of southern Oaxaca and the alliance of universities of the metropolitan area of Puebla, Chinese language courses in these universities are combined with courses in tourism and catering management, striving to highlight their interdisciplinary features. At the same time, in-depth cooperation between universities and enterprises has enhanced the directionality and practicality of Chinese language programs in the above universities. In addition, faculty members in this project optimize course content in a timely manner by collecting feedback from students to ensure that teaching meets market needs. This training model and curriculum setting will provide experience and new ideas to other universities.

Key Words: Mexican universities; Chinese language programs; interdisciplinarity; industry-education integration

1. Introduction Background

From 2019 to early 2024, the author of this paper has been constructing Chinese language programs in universities in southern and central Mexico and promoting cooperation between the project and enterprises. Several universities affiliated with the consortium of universities of southern Oaxaca and the alliance of universities of the metropolitan area of Puebla currently offer Chinese language and culture courses for full-time undergraduates and adult education students, including UABJO, UNPA, TecNM/ITVO, UAO, UMAR, UNIVAS, UMAD, UVP, UTP and BUAP. The Chinese language and culture courses in the above universities are basically in line with the training model of tourism and catering management majors. Students begin to learn Chinese language and culture after earning the necessary credits of professional basic courses and compulsory courses, and then pass the elementary Chinese language proficiency test and Chinese culture course exam, and then enter high-end restaurants, hotels and resorts and other enterprises for internship, while continuing to learn advanced Chinese language and culture courses. Interdisciplinarity and the integration of industry and learning are the characteristics of this project. As one of the leaders of this project, I've been committed to optimizing the course content and making the teaching content and methods more in line with the needs of enterprises; reaching agreements with enterprises, so that students have more opportunities to enter first-class enterprises for internship; gaining insight into market trends to provide students with more employment information.

The general Chinese language program lacks pertinence. Even after students have studied for a long time and mastered the Chinese language proficiently, they still face difficulties in finding a good job. The reason why many universities in central and southern Mexico combine the teaching of Chinese language and culture with courses in tourism and catering management is to improve the pertinence and practicability of teaching-learning, so as to enhance the market competitiveness of students. At the same time, allowing students to enter corporate internships as early as possible and helping students accumulate work and social experience as early as possible can also improve their employment rate after graduation. There are no previous research results on this topic, because the Chinese language programs in these universities have only been established for about 5-6 years, depending on different universities.

2. Literature Review

This paper involves many aspects, including Mexico's tourism and catering industry, the history of Chinese migration to Mexico, the theory of the integration of industry and education, and the existential crisis of liberal and language studies. Regarding the impact of Chinese immigrants on Mexican society and eating habits, the literature I have consulted mainly includes: *The Chinese in Mexico, 1882-1940* by Robert Chao Romero, published by University of Arizona Press in 2010, this book introduced Chinese immigration patterns, interracial marriages between Mexicans and Chinese, Chinese-Mexican community organizations, etc.; *Chinese Mexicans: Transpacific Migration and the Search for a Homeland, 1910-1960* by Julia Maria Schiavone Camacho, published by University of North Carolina Press in 2012, this book described Chinese settlement in northwestern Mexico and local responses, Chinese Mexican community formation, etc.; *Making the Chinese Mexican: Global Migration, Localism, and Exclusion in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* by Grace Delgado, published by Stanford University Press in 2012, this book discussed Chinese migration networks into the Americas, Chinese and Mexican relationships in everyday meaning, etc.

The above-mentioned works all mentioned the integration of Chinese and Mexican cultures, and pointed out that although the Chinese who migrated to Mexico were once excluded and expelled by the locals, their identity, lifestyle and culture were eventually accepted. By combing the historical facts covered by these academic monographs and the authors' conclusions, I was able to study: How do Chinese immigrants create "new Chinese food" that suits the tastes of Mexicans? How have Mexicans' eating habits been influenced by Chinese immigrants and their descendants? Why do Mexico's catering and tourism industries need employees who can speak Chinese currently? Why can Chinese teaching be combined with majors and disciplines such as catering management and tourism management?

Regarding the relationship between industry-education integration and new talent training models, the literature I have consulted mainly includes: *The Theory and Practice of Universities to Promote Industry-University-Research-Application* by Guo Dacheng, published by Beijing Institute of Technology Press in 2012; *Industry-Education Development Community: A Mode for the Application-Oriented Talents*

Cultivation by Qiao Haishu, Lu Hua and Chi Lingda, published by China Society Science Publishing House in 2021; *100 Typical Cases of Industry-Education Integration and School-Enterprise Cooperation, 2021-2022* by Diao Qingjun, Li Guiyun and Xu Yunqing, published by Qinghua University Press in 2023. These works use various cases to demonstrate the necessity and superiority of industry-education integration from different perspectives.

Regarding the existential crisis of the humanities, the literature I've mainly consulted are: *Permanent Crisis: The Humanities in a Disenchanted Age* by Paul Reitter and Chad Wellmon, published by University of Chicago Press in 2021, this book reveals the harsh reality that the humanities are often seen as irrelevant to the modern profession and often lack of funding, and the author argues that the humanities should position themselves as a unique resource to gain status; In addition, *Why Do Geniuses Come in A Cluster* by Wang Fansen, published by Social Sciences Literature Press in 2019, analyzes from another perspective how the humanities have gradually become detached from daily life, and how the indicatorization of humanities and social sciences education has further exacerbated the survival crisis of the humanities. These works faithfully reflect the current survival status and awkward situation of the humanities.

My research focuses on the development of the subject/discipline -- Chinese language and culture in Mexico. As a not-that-popular language, Chinese is only studied by a small number of Mexican students. After paying tuition fees, students can't help but fall into a kind of anxiety, that is, what is the use of learning Chinese in Mexico? What work can Chinese language be used in? For the above research topics, the writings of Chinese and foreign scholars have given me inspiration and ideas.

3. Research Methodology

This paper adopts qualitative research methods. I consulted a lot of information and combined it with my own teaching practice experience to analyze the research issues and try to propose solutions. To some extent, my conclusions will be drawn from students' feedback and field research. The interaction between theory and practice and the improvement of each other in the interaction have contributed to my research. For me, the purpose of doing this research is to reflect on how overseas Chinese education

should match the needs of the local job market, so as to better promote Chinese teaching and promote a more practical talent training model, so that students can apply what they have learned and make Chinese skills and related knowledge background truly a tool for students to add value to themselves.

4. Research Results

4.1. The reasons for combining Chinese language and culture courses with tourism and catering management courses

According to the Annual Report on the Development of China's Outbound Tourism (2023-2024) released by the China Tourism Academy on February 1, 2024, "In 2023, the number of Chinese outbound tourists exceeded 87 million. The number of outbound tourists is forecast to be 130 million in 2024." (China Tourism Academy, 2024) The China Tourism Academy also conducted a questionnaire survey on the needs and willingness of Chinese tourists to travel abroad, and concluded that: Overall, young and middle-aged people and freelancers account for a large proportion of outbound tourists, and urban residents in second-tier cities have a more prominent willingness to travel; Chinese people pay more attention to the convenience of transportation and local prices, and look forward to the specialty food and novel experiences. Chinese people's travel intentions are more diversified, and emerging tourist destinations are gradually entering the tourists' vision. (China Tourism Academy, 2024)

Based on the above survey results, Mexico seems to fit the preferences of Chinese people when choosing overseas travel destinations. Compared with developed countries in Europe and the United States, Mexico's accommodation, transportation and catering costs are relatively low. As an old Latin American country that was colonized by Spain, Mexico not only possesses the cultural treasures left by the Mayans, Aztecs and ancient Incas, but also possesses the Catholic culture brought by Spanish colonists. Visitors can either admire the mysterious stone pyramids or stroll among the magnificent churches. In addition, given Mexico's checkered history and complex geographical location, Mexican cuisine is also rich, varied and colorful. All of the above can satisfy the factors that Chinese people consider when traveling abroad: to gain unique cultural experiences while spending low travel costs. The inference has become

reality. The Chinese Embassy in Mexico released information on its official website in March 2021, stating that “since 2018, China has become the largest source country of tourists to Mexico in Asia.” (Embassy of Republic of China in Mexico, 2021) On August 17, 2023, CGTN America (the Americas Channel of China Global Television Network) published an article titled “Large numbers of Chinese tourists heading back to Mexico”, which stated that “Chinese tourism to Mexico is expected to increase dramatically after China added Mexico back to the list of Latin American countries open to group tours following the Covid-19 pandemic. Mexican officials say a massive influx of Chinese visitors to Mexico is a plus for the country”. (CGTN America, 2023)

It is precisely because of the keen awareness of the increasing number of Chinese tourists choosing to travel abroad, and the growing number of Chinese tourists who are willing to explore the passionate country--Mexico, and the number of Chinese tourists after the pandemic may experience an explosive growth, that the universities in southern and central Mexico have subsequently launched targeted Chinese programs to cultivate high-end tourism and catering industry professionals proficient in Chinese.

It is worth noting that Chinese food culture and cooking traditions have actually taken root in Mexico. For example: residents living in Mexicali, the capital of Baja California, Mexico, love Chinese food. In this Mexican city close to the U.S. border, Chinese food has exceeded with a history of 130 years, more than 200 Chinese restaurants are scattered in various streets and corners of the city. In 1882, the U.S. Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act. Since then, it has been difficult for Chinese workers to survive in the United States, so a large number of Chinese moved to Mexico--a neighboring country of the United States--to start a new life. Some Chinese who were unable to enter the United States have also been stranded in Mexico. (Morehouse, 2015) Another reason is that the Colorado River Land Company, which was established and controlled by Americans, owned a large number of real estate and properties in Mexicali, established branches, and hired a large number of Chinese laborers. (Cummings, 2001) In other words, there were already many Chinese living in Mexico in the 1880s, and they naturally brought the extensive and profound Chinese food culture to this land. Nowadays, Chinese food has become a hallmark of Mexicali. If a tourist asks what the special food is here, the locals will not recommend tacos or Mole sauce, but Chinese food. (Morehouse, 2015) After years of cultural fusion, whether it is the selection of

ingredients, cooking techniques or sauce preparation, Chinese food has been highly integrated with Mexican native elements, becoming a cross-cultural product that is “not authentic”. Today, Chinese restaurants have opened all over Mexico, and Chinese cuisine is increasingly sought after by locals. According to statistics from some large and popular travel websites (including opentable.mx, timeout.mx, banquetes.mx, etc.), there are more than 800 Chinese restaurants in Mexico, most of these Chinese restaurants will pair Chinese food with tortillas, guacamole, and salsa.

The Chinese program launched by the consortium of universities of southern Oaxaca and the alliance of universities of the metropolitan area of Puebla also includes Chinese food culture, Chinese culinary arts and Chinese table etiquette. These courses are in conjunction with the basic and compulsory courses of the catering management major. The establishment of it also has obvious and clear pertinence and directionality. It was a decision made by me and my colleagues after conducting market research. As mentioned before, on the one hand, Chinese food has a long history in Mexico and is extremely popular; on the other hand, Mexico has gradually become a popular destination for Chinese tourists, who may miss their hometown cuisine during their travels, but also want to taste fusion, innovative new dishes that can not only adapt to Chinese taste buds, but also have Mexican flavor. Through the study and practical operation of a series of courses, students will be able to meet such market needs.

4.2. The necessity and urgency of promoting and deepening “industry-education integration”

Many instructors in charge of “market and employment” courses may have heard the following sentence when they strongly recommend their own university’s undergraduates to enterprises: “The hands-on ability of BA graduates is not as good as that of vocational and technical school students. Rather than hiring someone who has a bachelor degree but does not have practical skills, it is better to hire a technical school student who already has rich practical experiences.” In Mexico, employers also favor graduates who have accumulated a certain level of work experiences. As the saying goes, practice is the only standard to test theory. In order to cultivate students’ practical ability to apply knowledge and help them adapt to society as soon as possible, my colleagues and I have been promoting and deepening the cooperation between

universities and enterprises, the integration of teaching and practice, so that students can learn from their work experiences and draw lessons from them, thus reflecting on theory and correcting it, laying a foundation and making full preparations for future employment and entrepreneurship. At present, the Chinese programs of the consortium of universities of southern Oaxaca and the alliance of universities of the metropolitan area of Puebla are cooperating with high-end enterprises, such as P.F.Chang, Asia Fusion Restaurant, Lu Yu Tea Room, Shangri-La Hotel, Hilton Hotel and so on. The universities have signed agreements with these companies. Students can apply for “learning by observation” apprenticeship in these companies from the first year of college, and can apply to enter the formal internship stage from the third year of college. Students with outstanding performance will be converted from unpaid internships to paid internships. After the internship period, the company will arrange jobs for outstanding students and waive the probation period. The combination of industry and academia breaks the old mode of talent training and makes university education closer to market demand.

In addition, the author of this paper and her colleagues have paid close attention to the internship process of students in the Chinese program and actively collected feedback to let us know whether the course content and teaching methods we designed are appropriate and practical for students, so that we could better optimize the teaching design in the future. While regularly observing the students’ internship process, I also designed a series of open questions and conducted in-depth interviews with them near the end of the internship. I try to create a relaxed, chatty environment where they can open their hearts and talk freely.

The main questions designed by the author of this paper are listed in the end of the paper as Appendix 1.

By collecting students’ answers to the above questions and encouraging them to elaborate as divergent and extended as possible, the course content and teaching methods of the Chinese program are constantly updated and optimized to achieve so-called “teaching and learning promote and enhance each other” or “teachers and students can profit from each other”. For example, the lessons/topics such as how to make and receive calls politely in a business environment, how to hold a business negotiation conference, what to talk/discuss in a business cocktail party, how to settle

complaints of guests and clients have been added to enrich the Chinese language program. A new course named “Coffee houses and Western restaurants in China” has been designed and taught by the author of this paper as a cross-college joint training course in the Puebla Metropolitan Area for the postgraduate students and senior undergraduate students, the detailed syllabus is attached in the end of the paper as Appendix 2.

5. Conclusion: Strategies for survival in crisis

Impacted by the COVID-19 epidemic, the total economic value of various countries has declined to varying degrees since 2020. However, at the same time, artificial intelligence technology has developed rapidly. These social factors have caused the humanities job market to shrink, and the ensuing domino effect makes humanities majors in universities encounter recruitment difficulties. In order to save financial expenditure, some colleges and universities have to reduce the size of humanities departments or even eliminate related majors. According to a survey by Gaby Gutierrez, editor-in-chief of *The Purple Tide*, “In 2010, there were four times as many arts and humanities majors at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMD) as computer science majors. By 2023, however, arts and humanities majors had declined to 2,400, while the number of computer science majors had increased to 3,300.” (Gutierrez, 2024) Journalist and author Elaine S. Povich once wrote an article titled “Flagship Public Universities Likely to Cut More Humanities, Staff”, the author listed several well-known universities in the United States as examples: West Virginia University will dissolve 28 majors, including French, Spanish and Russian, and 12 percent of professors will lose their jobs. Missouri Western State University have already cancelled dozens of majors and minors in English, history, philosophy, sociology, art, Spanish and French; The State University of New York at Potsdam is also cutting degree programs including art history, dance, French, Spanish and drama. The author noted that “Humanities courses such as languages, history, arts and literature are particularly vulnerable nationwide. Schools are more inclined to emphasize business, science, math and technology studies, which could lead to more high-paying jobs.” (Povich, 2023) In fact, humanities disciplines and majors around the world are in such a crisis. For example, the board of Duksung Women’s University in South Korea

has decided to abolish German and French language departments from 2025. Many people in the industry are worried that this move may lead to the collapse of the humanities in the entire Korean university community. (Yonhap, 2024)

Faced with the above severe situation, if language-related disciplines in higher education institutions want to “survive” and further develop, both the leadership and decision-making levels of the institutions, as well as the frontline teachers who work tirelessly in teaching, should conduct market research in advance and integrate language-related disciplines with other strong disciplines as much as possible. They should also initiate cross-disciplinary, targeted teaching modes and talent cultivation, deepen cooperation between enterprises and schools, provide students with more opportunities to go out of college campus and enter the society, pay attention to cultivating students’ practical operation abilities, and adjust course content based on students’ feedback. In this way, the curriculum system and content of the discipline can meet market demand.

As to Chinese language and culture program for non-Chinese speakers, in addition to linking it to the language needs of industries such as catering and tourism, we can also offer special courses such as "Chinese for Flight Attendants", "Luxury Marketing and Chinese Purchasing Power", etc. According to a survey done by Martin Roll, “For several years now, the global spotlight has been on Chinese luxury consumers, and for good reason. Between 2015 and 2018, Chinese consumers’ local spending contributed twice as much growth in absolute value as their spending abroad. Despite the slowing of domestic luxury consumption, Chinese tourists are spending more in luxury retail locations overseas. Of the 33% of total global luxury purchases by Chinese consumers, it is estimated that close to 70% of luxury consumption occurs outside the mainland and abroad.” (Roll, 2020) Willi Sun, Head of Advisory, Consumer & Retail, KPMG China, points out, “It is important for global luxury companies to understand the evolution of Chinese consumers as different segments do follow a pattern. Moreover, targeting the right segment of consumers to create ‘desire’ will also be able to generate a rippling effect on other up-and-coming segments for a sustainable brand equity in China.” (Wei, 2023) However, not every Chinese who travels overseas to buy luxury goods can speak the local language. If flight attendants and cashiers at luxury stores can learn some Chinese etiquette and master Chinese language, they will

surely be able to better serve Chinese customers and seize business opportunities. That's why some airlines and large stores require their employees to learn some basic Chinese. If students want to work in the flight attendant service industry or luxury retail industry in the future, mastering a certain level of Chinese will help them win the job competition. Therefore, relevant short-term training courses can be developed as needed.

In short, only when graduates have a bright future can universities have a bright future. Everything should be student-centered. Although this article discusses the current situation of Chinese teaching overseas, the thinking ways mentioned in the article can actually be used as reference by a wide range of humanities and linguistics disciplines. As for Chinese as a second language, it does not have a wide “audience” in European and American countries. During and after the epidemic, some people have prejudices against Chinese language and Chinese people. On the one hand, Chinese language and culture instructors should strive to eliminate such prejudices; on the other hand, the special attention paid to the practicality of Chinese language and curriculum reform done by the implementers of Chinese language programs at universities in southern and central Mexico is worth learning.

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Appendix 1:**Questionnaire of Personal Interview:**

Do you think there is a gap between theory and practice when the Chinese language and culture knowledge taught by schoolteachers is applied to work? (You don't need to propose theoretical support or new theories, just talk about your own feelings with examples.)

What specific difficulties did you encounter during practice that made you feel that the Chinese language and culture knowledge taught by schoolteachers was too theoretical?

As a student enrolled in the Chinese language and culture program, part of your internship placement is in upscale Chinese restaurants that blend the essence and flavors of Chinese, Mexican, and European cuisine. How are the Chinese culinary arts you've learned at school applied to your internship? In what ways did your practical experience enrich the knowledge you've learned at school?

As a student enrolled in the Chinese language and culture program, you have interned at hotels and resorts where a significant portion of the clients is Chinese tourists. When you provided services to them in Chinese, were they satisfied with your service?

Although you have studied theoretical courses on Chinese language and culture at school and are aware of the cultural differences between China and Mexico and have mentally prepared for them, have you ever encountered communication barriers? What factors do you think have caused these communication barriers? How do you think these barriers can be avoided and how to furtherly improve the service quality?

From your personal internship experience, what theoretical knowledge learned in school has helped you the most in your work practice? Which Chinese words/phrases/sentences are used most often? How do you think the school's Chinese language and culture courses should be improved and optimized to better meet the work practice, market needs and your future employment or entrepreneurship?

Appendix 2: Course Syllabus

Course: Coffee houses and Western restaurants in China -- collective memory, social life and urban citizenship constructed by taste experience and spatial aesthetics.

Course Designer/Instructor: Dr. Huang Xiao

Course Introduction: This course is a cross-college joint training course in the Puebla Metropolitan Area and is an elective course for majors such as culinary anthropology, culinary arts and catering management, and catering space design. The course is open to postgraduate students and senior undergraduate students in related majors. In addition to cultural teaching in the classroom, students will also conduct on-site investigations and research.

Course Features: This course combines theory with practice and is an interdisciplinary course that covers topics such as food aesthetics, lifestyle aesthetics, and marketing. During the internship, students will learn how to make innovative drinks and cuisines with Chinese elements.

Course Selection Prerequisite: Students must have completed most of the required courses in their major with excellent grades (graduate students must have completed 60% of the required courses in their major with a GPA of 4.0 at least; undergraduate students must have completed 80% of the required courses in their major with a GPA of 4.0 at least). The English proficiency of students must reach the intermediate to advanced level (proficient in listening, speaking, reading and writing, with a score of 6 in IELTS or 65 in TOEFL or 105 in Duolingo or B2 in the CEFR exam).

Special Statement: Senior undergraduate students must have obtained the qualifications required in their major/special area, such as: students specializing in cocktails blending must have obtained the junior sommelier certificate, students specializing in pastry making must have obtained the junior baker certificate, and so on.

Internship Project: This course includes two internship projects. Project 1: Inspection of La Paz High-end Catering Area (Luyu Tea House, Blue Jasmine Specialty Beverage Shop, Gambi Cafe, Asian Wind Restaurant, etc.); Project 2: Investigation of High-end Catering Areas in Chinatown (Shangri La Restaurant, P.F.Chang Restaurant, Fusion Restaurant, etc.).

Special Statement: Project 1 is located in the Puebla Metropolitan Area, with a duration of two weeks; Project 2 is located in Mexico City, with a duration of two weeks. Students who are determined to take this course must participate in these two internship programs.

Safety Guidelines: The school will arrange hotels for students to stay together, and students must return to the hotel before 10 pm. During the internship, students will still enjoy a lot of free time. Please take responsibility for your own safety.

Course Requirements: Students must complete the assignments/tasks included in the course, and the internship section will be graded by the internship supervisor.

Course Outline (12 weeks in total, 2 class hours per week, 50 minutes per class hour):

1. The history of coffee houses and western restaurants in the mainland of China.
2. Coffee, coffee houses and the lifestyle of Chinese cultural celebrities.
3. The success of Starbucks and Costa Café in Chinese mainland (analyze promotion, operating model, etc.).
4. The rise of Chinese local coffee chains (take Luckin, Nowwa and Cotti as examples);
5. The new flavors of Chinese style coffee and the aesthetic space created by Chinese coffee houses.
6. A city filled with the aroma of coffee -- the coffee houses and the culture created by foreign Chinese in Qingtian, Zhejiang Province.
7. Making a good cup of coffee at home – the popularity of specialty coffee beans and coffee utensils in Chinese mainland.
8. Surviving in the Cracks: Coffee Cultivation in the Mainland of China (take Yunnan Province and Hainan Province as Examples).
9. Internship (Project 1).
10. The spread and acceptance of Western food etiquette in Chinese mainland.
11. Shanghai's Western Restaurants and Shanghainese Western Food.
12. Harbin's Western Restaurants and the culture created by Russian refugees in Harbin.

13. Creative western cuisine in accordance with the customs and taste preferences of Chinese people (A creative fusion of Chinese and Western food cultures).

14. Coffee houses, western restaurants and the formation of Chinese petty bourgeoisie sentiment and atmosphere.

15. Coffee houses, Western restaurants and the Slow Food Movement in Chinese mainland.

16. Coffee houses and western restaurants in Chinese literature.

17. Internship (Project 2).

Class Time: every Monday and Thursday at 3pm.

Class Location: 3 Pte.748 A Piso 2, 205, Pue, Pue.