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Teaching China to the World: Evaluating the CAASK Model for International Student Education

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ABSTRACT: *As a compulsory course for international students in China, the Overview of China course helps them understand and adapt to different aspects of China through introductions. However, current research lacks enough focus on its teaching models. This study develops the CAASK teaching model, based on Fantini's paradigm and the course's actual situation, to optimize teaching effects. This model comprises both theoretical and practical dimensions: the theoretical dimension includes five concepts, which are cross-cultural awareness, attitude, comparison, knowledge, and skills; and the practical dimension encompasses four methods, which are in-class discussion, group presentation, lecture, and independent learning, as well as three stages, which are preclass self-study, in-class interaction, and postclass consolidation. Over the course of one academic year, this study verified the model's effects through classroom observations and semistructured interviews in undergraduate, postgraduate, and PhD classes. The cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral effects of this model were analyzed, all confirming the CAASK model's usefulness.*

Keywords: Cross-cultural awareness, Cultural teaching, International students, Overview of China, Teaching model, Teaching effect

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As a responsible nation, China has been actively promoting the vision of “the Community with a Shared Future for Mankind” worldwide before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, advocating for exchanges and mutual learning between Chinese and foreign cultures. This vision provides a guiding framework and a potential pathway for the world to follow. Effective cross-cultural communication and mutual understanding require interaction in an equal, reciprocal, diverse, inclusive, and open manner, fostering the coexistence and mutual appreciation of diverse civilizations and cultures. As an essential way and component of Sino-foreign cultural exchanges, international Chinese language education has the responsibility and obligation to “actively carry out language exchanges and cooperation and multicultural exchanges and mutual learning” (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2021) to enable the world to appreciate long-standing Chinese culture and contemporary China. The Overview of China course is an effective approach in international Chinese language education. The exploration of its teaching model can promote exchanges and mutual learning between Chinese and foreign civilizations and cultures, thereby enabling international students in China to gain a clearer understanding of China, the Chinese people, and Chinese culture.

Although previous research has explored the teaching of the Overview of China course in China from different angles (Zu & Lu, 2006; R. Feng, 2012; W. Hu, 2022), few studies have proposed a well-founded and practical teaching model for this course. Therefore, this study aims to tackle this existing problem in two ways: first, by suggesting an original CAASK teaching model based on Fantini’s A+ASK paradigm and the situations of the Overview of China course in China, which could be applied as a functional tool to assist teachers; second, by verifying the CAASK model’s teaching effects in the real classroom through classroom observations and interviews with international students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Overview of China Course

The Overview of China course is a compulsory course in the general education curriculum for international students in China. It aims to help students understand China and adapt to studying and living there by introducing various aspects of the country, including geography, history, society, literature, politics, diplomacy, and related themes. Early research on this course mainly focused on its teaching content and methods (Q. Chen, 1995). Subsequently, relevant research was sporadic and attracted little attention from the academic community. Since the Ministry of Education of China issued the *Higher Education Quality Standards for International Students in China (Trial)* in 2018, research on this topic has increased. This governmental higher education document states that the cultivation of international students in China should be implemented from four aspects: “disciplinary and professional level”, “language ability”, “understanding of China”, and “cross-cultural and global competence”. The “understanding of China” is directly related to the Overview of China course, indicating a specific direction for it. The goal stated in the document refers to the overall objective, which differs from the actual teaching goals in real-world teaching. In light of this, some scholars point out that the teaching goal of the Overview of China course should be to cultivate learners’ cross-cultural competence (Zu & Lu, 2006), while others believe it can be to develop learners’ multicultural awareness and cross-

cultural communicative competence, academic research competence, and Chinese language competence (W. Hu, 2022).

Currently, research on the Overview of China course mainly involves textbook comparison (R. Feng, 2012), textbook compilation (Q. Wu, 2016; Liu & Li, 2020), teaching design (Meng, 2015), teaching methods and strategies (Han, 2004), curriculum construction and reform (Zu & Lu, 2006), and teaching models (W. Hu, 2022). However, in discussions of teaching methods, some scholars fail to distinguish them from teaching models when they are applied in real contexts. Some scholars have proposed interactive, situational, or task-based teaching (Hu & Zhang, 2020; C. Wu, 2020), which can be viewed as teaching models or methodologies, characterized by systematic and holistic approaches and a stronger theoretical foundation, distinct from teaching methods, strategies, or skills. Concerning teaching models for the Overview of China course, there are currently two tendencies in the academic community: on the one hand, directly borrowing and applying Western theories to the Chinese teaching context or making local improvements, such as the task-based teaching model (Hu & Zhang, 2020), the PBL teaching model (Gao & Ming., 2021), and the hybrid teaching model (W. Feng, 2021); on the other hand, summarizing and refining based on teaching experience, such as the “independent learning, classroom interaction and exploratory activities” teaching model (W. Hu, 2022). The latter is more suitable for international students in China, as it is specifically tailored to that teaching context. However, regrettably, there is currently little research in this area, let alone research that covers all levels, from undergraduate to PhD students. This study, based on Fantini’s paradigm and the current situations and features of this course, introduces a CAASK teaching model that offers Chinese teachers a possible and potential solution to improve their cultural teaching.

Teaching model

As an academic term, the word “model” refers to “the standard form of something or a standard pattern that people can follow” (Division of Dictionary Compilation, Institute of Linguistics, CASA, 2016, p.919). Therefore, a teaching model is a standardized form of instruction that encompasses both theoretical and practical aspects. The former implies that a teaching model is a “logically consistent system of thought” (Maxwell, 2013, as cited in S. Chen & Le, 2018, p. 123), thereby emphasizing the theoretical and abstract nature of the teaching model. The latter implies that a teaching model is “a tool for understanding the framework of theories and implementing the theories in teaching and learning” (Winataputra, 2001, as cited in S. Chen & Le, 2018, p. 123), highlighting its practical and operational nature. In the field of international Chinese language education, although scholars such as Cui (1999) and Ma (2004) have different definitions, they all tend to regard the teaching model as a teaching method, a teaching paradigm, or a teaching implementation plan, emphasizing the practical and operable nature of the teaching model. Apart from this, Gu (2013) and Jiang (2024) also stress its theoretical nature: Gu points out that the teaching model includes macroteaching concepts, meso-level overall design, and microlevel implementation, while Jiang emphasizes that the teaching model embodies teaching theories. The teaching model should be a composite model that integrates both theoretical and practical levels, providing not only conceptual guidance and a theoretical basis for specific teaching but also practical procedures and methodological strategies that can be applied. In this sense, the CAASK teaching

model proposed in this study combines practical and theoretical dimensions and is designed to provide Chinese teachers with a possible pathway for enhancing their cultural teaching in the Overview of China course.

Conceptualizing the CAASK Teaching Model: A Model for the Overview of China Course

Fantini proposed the A+ASK paradigm in 1999 to discuss his views on cross-cultural competence. As a key goal in foreign language teaching, cross-cultural competence, or cross-cultural communicative competence, refers to “a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself” (Fantini, 2006, p.12). To achieve this goal, based on Bloom’s educational classification of affect, cognition, and behavior, Fantini proposed the A + ASK paradigm composed of four elements: knowledge, attitude, skill, and awareness. In his model, knowledge is equivalent to Bloom’s cognitive domain, skill is comparable to the behavioral domain, attitude is equivalent to the affective domain, and awareness is the core of the model. In his view, awareness, a concept reflecting the irreversibility of one’s own or others’ actions, is a prerequisite for effective interaction, meaning that awareness can help individuals engage in self-reflection and introspection. Once awareness is achieved, one cannot return to the state of unawareness. Among these four elements of the model, awareness is the core element, and its relationship with the other three is that awareness contributes to a deeper level of attitude, skill, and knowledge, which, in turn, can promote the development of awareness (Fantini, 1999).

Based on Fantini’s paradigm, this study modifies and introduces the CAASK teaching model (the specific framework is illustrated in Figure 1) for the Overview of China course, aiming to enhance Chinese teachers’ cultural teaching practices. Theoretically, this model explicitly includes five concepts, four methods, and three stages.

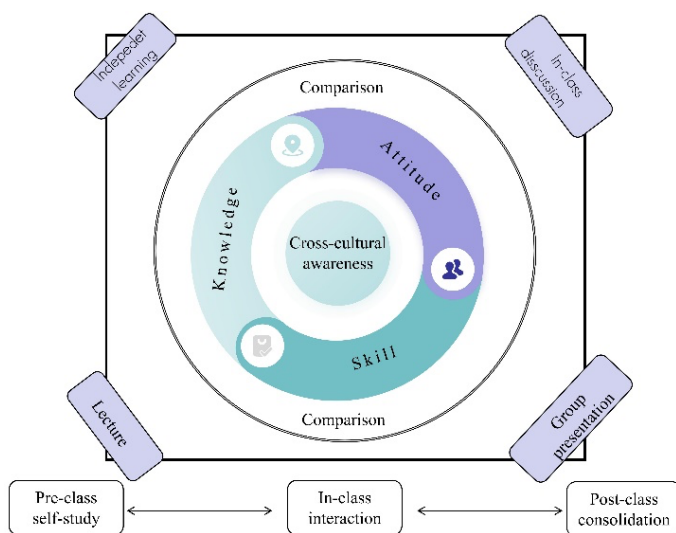


Figure 1: The CAASK Teaching Model

Five concepts—*Comparison*, *cross-cultural awareness*, *attitude*, *skill*, and *knowledge*—are the direct source of the model’s name and the theoretical dimension of the model, belonging to the conceptual layer. *Comparison* refers to the examination of similarities and differences between the target-language culture and the learner’s native culture. It is required to be conducted through the teaching and learning of the Overview of China course and the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and cross-cultural awareness. *Cross-cultural awareness* means “the students’ recognition and sensitivity toward the nuances of cultural issues and disparities” (Lu et al., 2025, p.159). It should be clear that this cross-cultural awareness equals the critical cultural consciousness/awareness of Kumaravadivelu (2003) and Byram (1997), that is, one should understand that “there is no one culture that embodies all and only the best of human experience; and, there is no one culture that embodies all and only the worst of human experience” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.271). *Attitude*, which plays an enormous role in second language learning (Garg, 2025), is a prerequisite for successful cross-cultural communication, which includes whether learners are curious and open-minded toward the target language culture or whether they can prevent themselves from being influenced by the stereotypes shaped by their native culture (Byram, 1997). *Skills* refer to all the relevant skills contributing to the learning of the Overview of China course, including presentation, cooperation, discovery, interpretation, interaction, and other relevant skills. These skills are beneficial for international students to demonstrate their understanding of Chinese culture to others, collaborate to complete tasks, critically and reasonably interpret specific aspects of Chinese culture, and apply the learned cultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills in real communication contexts both inside and outside the classroom. *Knowledge* refers to content related to the target language culture, including Chinese traditional culture, contemporary China, and culture related to society and life (Zu, 2022). These five concepts coexist and confluence each other: attitude, knowledge, and skills are direct objectives of the Overview of China course, all three jointly promote the formation and development of cross-cultural awareness; comparison intertwines from the beginning to the end of the development of attitude, knowledge, skills, and cross-cultural awareness of international students, with cross-cultural awareness as the core.

Four methods, namely, *the lecture method*, *independent learning*, *in-class discussion*, and *group presentation*, are specific teaching methods and strategies that belong to the method layer of this model. *Independent learning* focuses on developing the learning autonomy of international students across various sections of the course, enabling them to be actively engaged in the course. *The lecture* highlights the significant role of teachers in the teaching and learning process within the Overview of China course. *In-class discussion* refers to the interactions between teachers and international students, which occur in two forms: teacher–student discussions and student–student discussions. *The group presentation* emphasizes inquiry-based learning in cooperation, requiring international students to independently select relevant topics and make in-class presentations as PowerPoint slides or videos after forming a group.

Three stages, including *preclass self-study*, *in-class interaction*, and *postclass consolidation*, are specific teaching processes that belong to the procedural layer of this model. The three stages are divided based on the chronological order of the course implementation: “Stage One: Preclass Self-study” is the preparatory period for the knowledge of the Overview of China course, emphasizing the self-study of international students; “Stage Two: In-class Interaction” is the stage that

verifies the self-study effect in international students, teaches and receives new knowledge, and encourages students to internalize cultural knowledge, emphasizing interactive communication between teachers and students, as well as between the students' native cultures and Chinese culture, within the classroom context; "Stage Three: Postclass Consolidation" is the stage for further organizing and deepening self-study, as well as integrating the knowledge gained in class. There is a linear temporal relationship among the three stages, and they also influence and promote each other.

METHODOLOGY

Context and Participants

This study was conducted in undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral classes at a reputable university in Beijing¹. According to the policy of the Ministry of Education of China, all international students studying in China are required to take the compulsory Overview of China course.

In this study, the undergraduate class comprised approximately 33 students, the postgraduate class comprised 20 students, and the doctoral class comprised 4 students. Students in these three classes came from various nations, including Thailand, South Korea, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Iran, Vietnam, Greece, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kenya, Nigeria, and São Tomé and Príncipe. They came from different colleges of this well-known university, including the School of Psychology, the Faculty of Psychology, the Faculty of Education, the School of Foreign Languages, the School of Geography, the School of Arts, and the School of International Chinese Language Education, which reflects that the course is a compulsory one open to all students from different schools and colleges of Chinese universities, not only for those related to Chinese language teaching. This diversity creates opportunities for cross-cultural communication among different nations, schools, and majors, broadening students' cross-cultural horizons and developing their cross-cultural communicative competence to some extent.

This study obtained information about the students in these three classes from the class attendance sheet and classroom observations at the beginning of the course and during the process.

Data Collection

To verify the teaching effect of the CAASK teaching model, this study employed two data collection instruments: classroom observations and semistructured interviews.

Classroom observations

This study conducted classroom observations in all three classes: an undergraduate class, a postgraduate class, and a doctoral class. The time duration of classroom observations ranged from the autumn to the spring semester of the 2023-2024 school year. Each class of the Overview of China course comprised sixteen weeks of teaching. Before entering the classroom, the researcher obtained explicit permission from the course lecturers. To minimize interference with the

¹ The Overview of China course is open for undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD students separately, which means there would be three classes for international students depending on their study phases in Chinese universities.

regular class occurrence, the researcher played a passive observer role throughout the process, positioning himself at the back of the classroom.

To keep the classroom observation data efficient, reliable, and accurate, the researcher recorded the classes and took detailed observational notes guided by the following structured observational framework: first, student participation and performance, capturing exchanges with the teacher, collaboration and interaction with peers, and engagement in class activities; second, pedagogical guidance, focusing on the teaching content, teaching methods, and class activity arrangement in accordance with the CAASK model. This framework enabled the systematic analysis of observational data to assess students' knowledge, skills, attitudes, comparison competence, and cross-cultural awareness. The audio recordings and observational notes altogether ensure the reliability and trustworthiness of the collected data.

Interviews

This study conducted semistructured interviews with students from the three classes, which offers a different perspective on verifying the teaching effect of the CAASK model. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling strategy to ensure a diverse range of perspectives, with criteria including voluntary participation, varied nationalities, and different academic levels. In terms of ethical considerations, all participants were informed about the purpose of this study. They had the right to withdraw at any time without consequence, and written informed consent was obtained from them, including the signatures of both participants and the researcher. Meanwhile, necessary measures were taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity before the interviews, and all personal information was removed or anonymized to protect participants' privacy in the article. The semistructured interview outline, designed based on the CAASK model, focused on the cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral changes of international students. To ensure its validity and relevance, the outline was reviewed and refined by two experts in international Chinese language education. In total, eleven international students received one-on-one interviews, either face-to-face or online. Each interview, conducted in Chinese, lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes and was transcribed into electronic text for further data analysis. The information from the interviews is listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Interview Information

No.	Nationality	Gender	College	Type	Interview duration	Interview format
1	Malaysia	female	Faculty of Psychology	PhD student	44'01''	face-to-face
2	Nepal	male	Faculty of Education	PhD student	48'11''	face-to-face
3	Poland	female	School of Sociology	PhD student	48'54''	face-to-face
4	Thailand	female	School of International Chinese Language Education	PhD student	52'53''	face-to-face
5	Indonesia	female	Faculty of Education	undergraduate	31'25''	face-to-face

6	Japan	male	Faculty of Education	undergraduate	52'23''	face-to-face
7	Japan	female	School of International Chinese Language Education	undergraduate	52'20''	face-to-face
8	Tajikistan	male	School of International Chinese Language Education	undergraduate	52'15''	face-to-face
9	São Tomé and Príncipe	male	School of Sociology	postgraduate	43'34''	online audio
10	Turkmenistan	male	School of Foreign Languages and Literature	postgraduate	35'18''	online audio
11	Thailand	male	Faculty of Education	postgraduate	26'31''	face-to-face

As seen from Table 1, the eleven interviewed students came from nine countries, namely, Poland, Nepal, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan, Tajikistan, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Turkmenistan, and five colleges, including the School of Sociology, Faculty of Education, School of Psychology, College of International Chinese Language Education, and School of Foreign Languages and Literatures. Six of them were males, and five were females.

The researcher conducted pilot interviews with PhD students at the beginning of this study in the autumn semester of 2023 and then revised and refined the interview questions to ensure they would serve the study more effectively. The interview primarily focused on the following aspects: the course's teaching methods and procedures; the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and cross-cultural awareness students had developed through the course; and suggestions they proposed, centered on the CAASK model's three layers. Therefore, the interview questions were designed as follows: (1) What do you think of the teaching methods used for the Overview of China course, including the method of lecture, in-class discussion, group discussion, and independent learning? Are they useful for your learning in this course? (2) How well have you grasped the content of the Overview of China course thus far? (3) What do you think of your group presentation, your interaction with other international students, and the teacher? Have you faced any difficulties, and how have you approached them? (4) Are you willing to know and understand Chinese society and Chinese culture positively? Has course learning changed your views and attitudes toward China, Chinese culture, and Chinese people? (5) Have you been aware of the differences and similarities between China and your country? Could you objectively judge the differences between these two countries? Does the Overview of China course contribute to your study, living, and learning in China? (6) Do you have any other suggestions for this course?

Data Analysis

The qualitative data from the interview transcripts and classroom observation notes were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis was guided by the cognitive-affective-behavioral three-dimensional framework of communication effects (Guo, 2011), which aligns with the research objective of examining the multifaceted teaching effects of the CAASK model. This framework provided an initial structure for organizing and interpreting the data. The analysis was conducted in accordance with the following procedures:

First, there is familiarization. Researchers reviewed all the interview transcripts and observation notes to gain a thorough understanding of the data.

Second, extraction and preorganization were performed. Meaningful data segments relevant to teaching effects were systematically extracted and then organized according to the three theoretical dimensions (cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral effects).

Third, review and refinement were performed. The preliminary categorization was rigorously examined. Segments were compared within and across dimensions to ensure coherent and distinctive thematic groupings. This step involved constant reflection between the data and the three dimensions.

Fourth, the definition and presentation are presented. The finalized themes within each dimension were clearly defined and presented. The most vivid and illustrative data extracts were selected to support the presentation of findings in the Results section.

RESULTS

Both classroom observations and interviews contributed equally to the usefulness of the data analysis. Based on these findings, this study can verify the teaching effects of the CAASK model on the Overview of China course. This study analyzes data from the perspectives of cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral effects, derived from three dimensions of communication effects. Teaching, in the last analysis, is a form of communication between teachers and students. Therefore, teaching effects can be viewed as a form of communication effect. With this, the actual teaching effects of the CAASK model could be clearly demonstrated.

Cognitive Effect

As mentioned above, the CAASK model consists of three layers of elements, comprising five concepts, four methods, and three stages. All these elements together influence the actual teaching effects of the Overview of China course. Theoretically speaking, cognitive effect refers to the impact on people's cognitive knowledge and structures (Guo, 2011). In this study, it is directly associated with improvements in international students' grasp of Chinese cultural knowledge and their cultural learning skills.

First, the CAASK model helps international students deepen their understanding of Chinese cultural knowledge. Knowledge in the Overview of China course encompasses various aspects of China, including history, geography, economy, science and technology, folk customs, literature and art, politics, and diplomacy, and is typically organized into distinct topics. Here, not only traditional culture but also modern culture, encompassing both the big C culture and the small c culture, are included. The transcribed interviews explicitly reflected the thoughts of the interviewed students on this matter. Some

interviewees said that their cultural knowledge had increased and they were more interested in Chinese culture: “As the course progresses, I feel that I’ve also received a lot of inspiration and learned a lot of knowledge, which has made me more interested in the Overview of China course.” (Interviewee 5) “I think it affects the cultural aspect, because I feel that I can have a good conversation with Chinese people when I communicate with them in China.” (Interviewee 8) This integration of knowledge underscores how the CAASK model’s structured progression—through its three stages and four methods—actively builds and deepens learners’ cognitive improvement in cultural knowledge.

Second, the CAASK model contributes to improving students’ skills in learning the Overview of China course. These skills are sharpened and improved primarily through the four methods of the CAASK model, namely, independent learning, lectures, group presentations, and in-class discussions. The interviewees generally believed that the teaching methods used in the course were reasonable and practical. These methods were helpful for course learning and understanding Chinese culture and conducive to enhancing students’ learning skills. For example, some international students said that group presentations helped improve their Chinese proficiency and inspire their exploration ability and mutual learning: “I think the teacher’s methods are effective... I’m also quite interested in some other teaching methods, including asking us to do PPT assignments.” (Interviewee 8) “Doing PPT can help and improve Chinese proficiency, and it can also help understand things about China.” (Interviewee 10) “This teaching model is carried out to stimulate and develop the capability of our personal growth and inquiry.” “I think it’s quite effective. The reason why this model advocates group work is to enable students with weaker learning abilities to receive help from those with stronger learning abilities. Everyone can learn from and share their knowledge or previous learning experiences with others.” (Interviewee 5) In addition, the interviewed international students also stated that self-learning and discussion helped stimulate students’ enthusiasm and enabled them to understand relevant cultural content. “Because now we need to preview everything. If the teacher didn’t ask me to do it, I definitely wouldn’t. So I think the teacher’s method is excellent.” (Interviewee 7) “For example, the manifestation of the ‘ritual’ culture is difficult, but discussion makes it easier for me to understand... I’m delighted with the teacher’s teaching method and the students’ discussions.” (Interviewee 4) The enhancement of international students’ skills in cooperation, discovery, interaction, etc., is a direct result of the four methods employed by the CAASK model within the Overview of China classroom.

In addition to the interviews, the classroom observational notes and recordings also support the two aspects of improvement above. Let us take the Overview of China course for undergraduate students as an example. When the class covered the theme of “Chinese history”, the teacher conducted the teaching step by step by following the three stages of the CAASK model: the teacher first handed out the Q&A sheet to each student and required them to have preclass independent learning based on that; then, the teacher asked them to answer all the questions on the list; then, the teacher gave the lecture on this theme according to the chronological sequence with necessary cultural content and points explained; in-class tasks were arranged, including the search of ‘the system of enfeoffment of the Western Zhou Dynasty’ and sharing in the class; and then, the teacher left a question for students to think after the class, “Why is Qin that finally united the whole of China?”. These arrangements furthered students’ grasp of ancient Chinese history, not only the memorized superficial content but also the deeper content beneath the surface.

Attitudinal Effect

Attitudinal effects refer to psychological or affective changes in people (Guo, 2011). This study is directly related to elements of attitude and cross-cultural awareness, as outlined in the CAASK model. In other words, it means the CAASK model can promote international students' understanding of China and Chinese culture in an equal, respectful, and inclusive way, rather than through stereotypes or bias. In addition, the model can also help them treat differences and similarities between China and their country more objectively.

On the one hand, this model enabled international students to understand the reasons behind things: "It makes me understand why Chinese people do things this way. There were some behaviors I might not have understood before, but this course makes it possible for me to know that they do so because of their thinking" (Interviewee 4). On the other hand, it promoted international students to reflect on their own stereotypes and gradually realize the differences between their own countries and cultures: "Learning this course has deepened our knowledge foundation and made us more familiar with China. It allows me to look at China from a perspective other than that of Japan, standing from a more objective perspective to view the various cultural differences and related issues between the two countries." (Interviewee 6) "I think I've changed. When visiting someone's home, I start to think about what to bring." (Interviewee 1) "Before, my classmates might have had the same stereotype of China as I did. With the Overview of China course and the influence of the teacher's teaching, preclass preview, or postclass review, they have also changed to some extent." (Interviewee 5) The observed shift in international students toward Chinese culture—from focusing on external behaviors and the surface culture to understanding internal beliefs and the deep culture—not only reflects a positive outcome of the CAASK model's structured activities but also serves as direct evidence for the model's effects in developing the attitudinal and cross-cultural awareness dimensions.

Additionally, these kinds of changes in attitudes and cross-cultural awareness are also assured and strengthened by comparisons in the Overview of China course. In this course, comparison includes comparisons between China and foreign countries, between different foreign countries, between ancient and modern times, and between various regions. Through comparisons, international students intuitively recognized the similarities and differences between their native culture and Chinese culture, which helps develop students' attitudes and cross-cultural awareness. According to classroom observations, the topic of "geography" offers a good example: teachers carried out different levels of comparison when facing undergraduates, postgraduates, and PhD students: for undergraduate students, the teacher horizontally compared the mother rivers of different countries when mentioning the Yangtze River; for postgraduate students, the teacher asked international students to think about the role of the specific geographical environment in the development of Chinese culture in comparison with other cultures; for PhD students, with the relationship between Chinese culture and its geographical environment as an example, the teacher explored the close relationship between human beings and the geographical environment in a specific region and required international students to explain their understanding in combination with the geographical characteristics of their own countries. Comparisons at different academic levels show a progression from surface culture to deep culture.

Behavioral effects, as reflections of individuals' external behaviors, are a natural result of cognitive and attitudinal effects (Guo, 2011). Some scholars argue that learners' behavioral changes are related to greater openness and expressiveness in communicating with native speakers (Watson et al., 2020). In this study, the behavioral effect refers to the performance of international students, including their ability to organize and demonstrate cultural content in class, their interest in cultural learning, and their adaptability to living and studying in China. The researcher found that the CAASK model helps international students achieve decent performance and shows a greater interest in learning Chinese culture, which can further enhance their lives and studies in China. These findings can be supported by the interview transcripts. "I found that I have been inspired a lot and grasped much knowledge. Now I feel that I am more interested in the Overview of China course." (Interviewee 5) "Now I live and study in China, I completely have no feeling that I am a foreigner. I feel that I have been a Chinese hand." (Interviewee 8) "Now I would like to live in China, to know more about Chinese society and history in a further way." (Interviewee 7) "This course does help my living and study in China." (Interviewee 10)

Apart from the interviewees' words, the researcher also observed that the international students' performance in the classroom was decent and well structured. In each group, international students used fluent, clear, and correct Chinese to present and report on their selected topics. The content was brief, clear, and well organized, allowing for conscious comparison between Chinese and foreign cultures, and it clearly analyzed and presented the similarities and differences between the two cultures. Let us take one of the undergraduate students' group presentations as an example. The topic the undergraduate group chose was "marriage and love". First, they briefly described Chinese weddings from the perspectives of traditional and modern weddings; then, they compared marriage customs between Thailand and China, between South Korea and China, between Indonesia and China, and between Tajikistan and China; then, they raised two questions for other students to consider: "Cancellation of betrothal gifts be regarded as disrespecting traditional values. What's your opinion? Is there anyone willing to cancel the wedding?" This presentation vividly embodies how the CAASK model translates its key concept of "comparison" into practical skills and decent performance via the "group presentation" method, producing directly observable competency.

In other words, the CAASK model appears to have positive effects. It can better promote international students' learning of relevant cultural knowledge in the Overview of China course, help them master the appropriate skills required for course learning and cross-cultural communication, and contribute to enhancing and improving their attitudes toward China and Chinese culture and their cross-cultural awareness, thus facilitating their study and life in China.

DISCUSSION: POSITIONING THE CAASK MODEL WITHIN KEY ISSUES

This study argues that the design of an effective cultural teaching model should address four core issues: the conceptualization of culture, the connection between theory and practice, contextual adaptability, and the role of comparative thinking.

Conceptualizing Culture: From Competing Views to an Integrated Framework

The foundational and critical issue lies in how culture itself is defined because it directly shapes cultural teaching goals. In second language education, culture has been predominantly viewed as (1) knowledge and information (Taylor, 1871); (2) behavior and function (Brooks, 1968); and (3) meaning and discourse (Kramsch, 1993). These views often lead to fragmented teaching approaches. The CAASK model is conceived as a deliberate synthesis and integration of these perspectives, encompassing the need for factual knowledge, practical skills, an appropriate attitude, and awareness, thereby to some extent overcoming the limitations of adopting any single view.

Bridging Theory and Practice

In second language teaching, a consistent challenge is how to apply theories to practice. As Zhu (2008) notes, language teaching is not merely about applying theories but about implementing theoretical explanations in actual teaching. While the CAASK model incorporates elements common to established intercultural competence frameworks (e.g., Byram, 1997; Fantini, 2009), its primary contribution is pragmatic and procedural. It moves beyond describing what competencies to develop to specifying how to cultivate them through its integrated pedagogical architecture—the four teaching methods and three learning stages—offering concrete scaffolding for the classroom.

Ensuring Contextual Adaptability: Addressing the Localization Gap

An important issue in applying Western theoretical models to the Chinese context is the “localization gap.” Many reputational models, such as Lafayette’s (1978) “Core Plus Open Time”, Crawford-Lange and Lange’s (1984) “A Model of the Integrative Language/Culture Learning Process”, and Byram’s (1989, 1997) “A Model to Foreign Language Education” and “Intercultural Communication Competence Model”, are developed in purely Western practice and are primarily designed for cultural teaching within language courses. If these Western models were directly applied to a specialized cultural course in a non-Western context, such as the Overview of China, it could lead to a mismatch in objectives and methods. In contrast, the CAASK model is developed based on the specific practice of teaching Chinese culture to international students in China. Therefore, it is an indigenously developed framework, ensuring both compatibility with the course’s goals and inherent adaptability to the local situation.

Foregrounding Comparison as a Critical Element

A key distinction between the CAASK model and previous models is that it places comparison in a more prominent position. While comparative reflection is often implicit in models such as Fantini’s (2009) A+ASK, CAASK makes it an overt learning outcome and a deliberate teaching strategy. By integrating comparison across all dimensions, the model actively guides international students to juxtapose cultural frames. This explicit focus is crucial for fostering an objective, nuanced, and empathetic stance toward Chinese culture, the learners’ own cultures, and third cultures, which defines advanced cross-cultural awareness.

Based on the Overview of China course for undergraduates, postgraduates, and PhD students at a well-known university in Beijing, this study summarizes and proposes the CAASK teaching model suitable for this course. This model is composed of theoretical and practical dimensions: the theoretical dimension specifically covers five major concepts (cross-cultural awareness, attitudes, comparison, knowledge, and skills), while the practical dimension covers four teaching methods (in-class discussion, group presentation, lecture, and independent learning), as well as three stages (preclass self-study, in-class interaction, and postclass consolidation).

The classroom observation and interview results indicate that the CAASK teaching model has a positive impact on the course's cultural teaching. The data show that the model facilitated international students' acquisition of Chinese cultural knowledge and attainment of relevant skills. Furthermore, the model was found to contribute to the cultivation of attitudes, the development of the ability to compare, and the growth of cross-cultural awareness among international students. These observed teaching effects support the model's potential application, indicating that it can serve as a reference for other cultural courses in international Chinese language education.

While this study provides meaningful insights, it also indicates directions for future research. To further substantiate the model's effects, subsequent studies could employ a mixed-methods or quantitative approach. Additionally, comparative studies could explore the model's applicability across different types of cultural courses. Finally, it would be valuable to test the model's applicability in non-Chinese contexts—for instance, in Overview of China courses offered abroad—to examine its transferability across diverse teaching environments.

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