



# Teaching Culture in the U.S. TCS/FL Conference, Jan. 8, 2023

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# Introduction

- Teaching Experiences
  - Colleges and universities in Taiwan (3 years), Southern Illinois University Carbondale (1 year), New College of Florida (7+ years)
  - Courses taught:
    - language courses on all levels (English, Mandarin)
    - content courses (literature, film, culture)
- Today's Talk
  - Teaching Culture—understanding oneself and others, establishing connections
  - Teaching Culture in Language Classrooms
  - Teaching Culture in English-taught Content Courses



# Teaching Culture—understanding oneself and others

- An 8 year-old's culture shock:
  - What does a “good teacher” mean?
  - A “good teacher” in Bloomington, Indiana v.s. A “good teacher” in Kaohsiung, Taiwan (1980s)
  - simple/generalized judgment—one culture is “good,” one culture is “bad”
- A foreign language major's revelation: understanding value systems and cultural differences through language and literature
  - unravel multilayered cultural formation
  - experience other cultures through reading literature
  - establish emotional connections and foster empathy



# Teaching Culture in Language Classrooms

- Highlight the cultural significance of certain terms–e.g. “家”
  - 大家 (social relations & family relations)
  - 家庭 & 稱謂 (family structure)
  - 國家 (national relations & family relations)
  - 君臣父子 (social hierarchy & family relations–patrilineal)
- Debate Exercise–e.g. 人治 vs. 法治
  - General discussion: definition, pros and cons, examples
  - Group debate: Is 人治 or 法治 a better way to run a country?
- Literary Translation
  - Translating mood and style–e.g. 格非
  - Translating classical texts–e.g. 老子《道德經》



# Teaching Culture in English (1)

- Topical courses in the field of modern Chinese Literature and/or film–e.g. science fiction, martial arts films
- Contextualization–prepare before class
  - social, historical, cultural background of the literary piece/film
  - author/filmmaker
- Develop critical thinking and analytical skills–in-class discussion
  - Meet students where they are: “How/what do you feel/think?”
  - The construction of the narrative: “How does the story make you feel that way?”
  - The significance of the work in its context: “What is the meaning of writing a story/making a film like that?”, “What does the story/film tell us about people or society at the time?”



## Teaching Culture in English (2)

- Foster emotional connection and empathy
  - emphasize similarities among differences—connecting on the basis of humanity
  - be in someone’s shoes: “How would you feel if you were the protagonist?” “What would you do if you were in that situation?”
- The production and perception of culture
  - e.g. Ang Lee’s *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) v.s. Zhang Yimou’s *Hero* (2002)
  - How is “Chinese culture” presented in the two films?
  - How were they received? Who are the target audiences?
- Critical reflection of one’s own culture
  - Martial arts in Hollywood films: *Kill Bill*, *Shang Chi*
  - How are “heroes” portrayed in Hollywood films?
  - cultural adaptation? appropriation? reinvention?



# Conclusion

- Teaching culture is multi-directional
  - critical understanding of others and oneself
  - cultural influences go both ways
- Interactive learning
  - discussion based
  - encourage critical inquiry
- Humanistic approach
  - emphasizing commonalities over differences
  - foster empathic connection and the care for others