

The Integration of Language and Culture in Chinese as a Foreign Language Teaching at University Level

Literature, Movies and TV Dramas as Teaching Tools to Develop Intercultural Communicative Competence

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Abstract Language and culture are closely interconnected. Therefore, to obtain the so-called ‘intercultural communicative competence’, culture must be an essential part of Foreign Language teaching, including Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL). Literature, films, and TV dramas are components of a culture; thus, they can effectively support the integration of language and culture study. This paper presents a teaching experiment, organized around the theme “Women and Their Relationship with Men”, that tried to integrate the two components in a workshop-based university course on Chinese literature for Italian and native Chinese-speaking students.

Keywords Chinese as a foreign language. Intercultural communicative competence. Language and culture teaching. Literature. Movies and TV dramas. Teaching tools. Motivation.

Sommario 1 Introduction. – 2 Language and Culture. – 3 Teaching Tools. – 4 Rationale Behind the Teaching Tools. – 5 The Course. – 6 Concluding Remarks.



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1 Introduction

Being effective communicators does not only mean to know a language.¹ As many have claimed, in fact, the cultural knowledge of a Foreign Language (hereafter FL) must be an integral part of the teaching process (Gabbianelli 2020) not only because learning a FL is “learning the language of a culture” (Kramsh 1993 cit. in Orton, Scrimgeour 2019, 151), but also because cultural knowledge supports the development of the intercultural communicative competence, that is

the ability to take up the perspectives of the listener or the reader and establish and maintain human relationships with people from other cultures. (Byram 1997 cit. in Wang, Jia 2023, 8)

This principle is undoubtedly also a foundation of CFL teaching (Zhang 2022). As a matter of fact, ‘cultural awareness’ is mentioned as one of the learning objectives² of the 2014 *International Curriculum for Chinese Language Education* and it is described as “an essential factor for enabling learners to use Chinese language more appropriately” (Lin et al. 2020, 121-2).

The so-called ‘Chinese fever’ (*hànyǔ rè* 汉语热) and the consequent growth in the number of students engaged in the study of Chinese language and culture in Italian universities (Masini 2022) impose a reflection on this aspect and lead to a broad question, far from being solved, which is how to develop communicative competence integrating the study of Chinese language and culture. In the attempt to address this challenge, the article provides an account of a teaching experiment conducted in an Italian university workshop-based course (hereafter ‘course’) devoted to Chinese literature, attended by both Italian and native Chinese-speaking students. In this course, literature, movies and TV dramas in their original language were employed as teaching tools to foster communicative competence while combining the study of Chinese language and culture. The presence of native Chinese-speaking students, enrolled in a master’s programme in foreign languages (English and Chinese) at the university, did not affect the main aim of the course, since its contents and objectives remained consistent with the Italian degree programme’s focus on Chinese language and culture acquisition.

1 This work is the result of close collaboration between the two authors, especially with regard to the Sections concerning the course design (whole chapter 5). For the concerns of the Italian academic evaluation processes, the writing of the article was divided as follows: Cristina Caterina Rambaldini is mainly responsible for Sections 1, 2, 5, 5.1 and 5.4, while Enrica Peracin is mainly responsible for Sections 3, 4, 5.2, 5.3 and 6.

2 The other objectives are linguistic knowledge, linguistic skills and strategies (Hanban 2014, III).

The paper is organized as follows: after a short introduction on the relationship between language and culture in FL teaching and in relation to CFL (§2), section 3 describes the teaching tools employed during the course. Firstly (§3.1), it is presented the role of literature in the FL classroom emphasizing its use as real language and its evident linguistic and cultural benefits (Licandro 2024). In Section 3.2, we describe the effectiveness of video-based materials, such as films and TV dramas, in integrating language and culture learning (Zhang 2022). We then highlight how these media, “cultural product[s] pregnant with cultural meanings” (Zhang 2011, 212), provide students with valuable opportunities to deepen both linguistic and cultural issues while sustaining students’ motivation in an era in which “maintaining students’ interest has become the main objective” (Ruan, Duan et al. 2015, 170). Section 4 focuses on the rationale behind the selection of the teaching tools employed, particularly their role in fostering student motivation (§4.1), developing a student-centred approach to learning (§4.2) and supporting internationalization (§4.3). The choice of the languages to be used as working medium by teachers and students is addressed in section 5, while the course together with its structure and organization are the subject of section 6: after a presentation of the characteristics of the course, we introduce the theme and the teaching materials (§6.1). We then discuss the organization of the course, focusing on the involvement of both Italian and Chinese teachers and on the implications and outcomes associated with this dual teaching presence (§6.2). Section 6.3 outlines the activities carried out, providing examples drawn from teachers’ lectures and students’ presentations. The article concludes with a set of final remarks (§7).

2 Language and Culture

The relationship between language and culture is widely recognized. Since they are inextricably linked (Brody 2003 cit. in Xing 2006), they have been considered as the two sides of the same coin in second language classroom (Brooks 1968; Tang 2006). In FL pedagogy this assumption probably dates back to Hall’s statement that “communication is culture and culture is communication” (Hall 1959 cit. in Tang 2006, 87). Thus, the idea of incorporating culture, the so-called “hidden dimension” (Hall 1966 cit. in Wong 2008, 2), into the language curriculum aims to improve both linguistic competence and cross-cultural understanding. In fact, in order to achieve the aforementioned communicative competence, culture must be an essential part of FL study (Singermann 1988 cit. in Wong 2008). Otherwise, as Wong (2008, 5) points out, “successful communication is very difficult”.

Chinese language teaching is no exception. As a matter of fact, the idea that language and culture teaching cannot be separated has

gradually been accepted also in the field of CFL (Orton, Scrimgeour 2019). However, all this seems to be easier said than done (Wong 2008). The prevailing perception is that culture is still commonly and widely treated as a stand-alone subject, inserted more or less *ad hoc* into language lessons (Danison 2013) or even as the subject of separate courses, especially at the university level where the division between 'language courses' and 'culture courses' remains predominant, "with the latter commonly referred to as 'content courses' and the language courses seemingly 'content-less'" (Yu 2009, 75).

For all these reasons, the teaching experiment described in this paper explores the potential of effectively integrating language and culture teaching using literature, cinema and TV dramas, undeniably components of a culture, to foster intercultural communicative competence.

3 Teaching Tools

Literature, movies and TV dramas are rich, complex and multifaceted sources that can help students focus on target language and culture in different ways. Moreover, they are successful teaching and learning instruments for improving FL competence and fostering cultural understanding and multicultural awareness. Literature promotes students' acquisition of language accuracy and cultural deepening. Movies and TV dramas are captivating and entertaining tools that can support students' understanding of different language codes and help the retention of cultural information.

3.1 The Literary Text

The use of literature in FL teaching has been widely recognized (Babae, Yahya 2014). Literary texts were used as a fundamental tool in the teaching of FL during the grammar translation approach period: they were considered good sources of grammatical structures and polished writing. Instead, the structural method considered literature as a model of an outdated teaching approach, and the same was true for the notional-functional method, which did not regard literature either as a genuine communicative tool or as a practical language sample (Babae, Yahya 2014). Over the past two decades, however, the value and the significance of literature in FL teaching have regained new space, because "It is in line with the new communicative approaches that have found in reading literature their desired principles namely communicative competence" (Sanz, Fernández 1997 cit. in Babae, Yahya 2014, 81).

The use of literature can expose learners to ‘real language’, which can give positive effects on the acquisition of both linguistic and pragmalinguistic competences (Gilmore 2007 cit. in Licandro 2024) as well as stimulate their emotional engagement (Mishan 2005 cit. in Licandro 2024), combining linguistic and cultural learning (Licandro 2024). Literature, in fact, contributes to the achievement of language accuracy (Gabbianelli 2020), since it offers elements of lexicon and syntax; it also provides cultural enrichment thanks to idiomatic expressions and language structures typical of the target language.

Literature can also support a ‘dynamic student-centred approach’ because in the teaching practice students play a central role, actively exploring the formal traits of literary texts, their communicative implications and their relevance to both historical contexts and personal experiences (Maugeri 2021).

3.2 Movies and TV Dramas

Integrating the use of literature with that of movies and TV dramas can be very effective because they facilitate the recognition of cultural elements and improve their retention (Gabbianelli 2020). Research underlines that information received through videos is more memorable (Choi, Johnson 2005 cit. in Gabbianelli 2020) and can boost students’ interest and motivation in learning (Gabbianelli 2020). Videos can help teachers build an entertaining and captivating student-centred learning environment (Hughes 2019). As Lottman (1961 cit. in Zhang 2011, 211) states, the visual image portrays “a real-life situation with dialogue [and] an authentic picture presented in an authentic contest”.

Movies are helpful in analyzing both verbal language, for example idiomatic expressions, and non-verbal language, such as objects, movements, facial expressions, gestures and cultural models, known as extralinguistic aspects (Maugeri 2021). Moreover, they can enhance students’ comprehension of movie-specific words, grammar patterns, conversational patterns, and the nuances of speech features employed during the time frame of the movie itself (Hughes 2019). Nowadays, a movie can be an effective tool for reaching a new generation of language learners (Hughes 2019), offering “a unique link to target language and culture because it is visual, it is authentic, it is readily available and because in the digital age [...] it is extremely attractive” (Sturm 2012 cit. in Hughes 2019, 44).

Movies and TV dramas share many elements and features, yet TV dramas have unique characteristics: they are episodic, more flexible and more realistic than movies (Zhang 2022). They can help train language skills in a new way, distinct from cinema (Diadori, Carpiceci, Caruso 2020 cit. in Martari 2020). TV dramas are a part of what is called ‘pop culture’ and as such, they offer

rich multimodal, often embodied, contemporary enactments of language and culture, typically created for the purposes of entertainment and enjoyment, but also easily adapted for educational purposes. (Pai, Duff 2020, 192)

TV dramas reflect authentic life and show typical everyday situations, focusing on human relationships and changes in social life. They give students enough time to get deeply in contact with the characters. Besides, the repetition of situations, language habits and environments helps students explore and reinforce their learning of the target language and culture, thereby increasing their motivation (Martari 2020).

4 Rationale Behind the Teaching Tools

The choice of using literature, movies and TV dramas as the main tools and, at the same time, content-objects of the course was due to many factors: firstly, they naturally embed both language and culture, a characteristic that aligns perfectly with the aim of the course. Secondly, they convey cultural messages that can be beneficial to students' "longer-term intercultural understanding and ability to interpret meaning and communicate effectively in Chinese or with Chinese people" (Orton, Scrimgeour 2019, 163). Lastly, these three media can be effective in fostering students' motivation, developing a student-centred approach to learning and support the presence of an international class of both Italian and native Chinese-speaking students.

4.1 Motivation

As far as motivation is concerned, Zoltan Dörnyei states that

Without sufficient motivation, even individuals with the most remarkable abilities cannot accomplish long-term goals, and neither are appropriate curricula and good teaching enough on their own to ensure student achievement. (Dörnyei 2005, 65)

Motivation plays a role in any learning process, and this is also true for FL learning (Dörnyei cit. in Wen 2018). Some studies have reported the effectiveness of integrating cultural elements in FL teaching in promoting learners' motivation to learn a FL (Dörnyei 1994; Ho 1998 cit. in Ruan, Duan et al. 2015; Csizér, Dörnyei 2005 cit. in Gabbianelli 2020). For example, Yu reports that "Learning the culture of the language being studied also provides learners with a strong motivation by making language learning more 'real'" (Yu 2009, 74).

Motivation also plays a role in CFL learning, especially for Italian students who have to deal not only with a language that is typologically distant from their L1, but also with a “distante Kultur” (Guder 2005). The integration of Chinese culture in the CFL classroom has been proven to develop motivation (Zhou, Wang 2020 cit. in Wang Guenier, Li 2022; Ruan, Duan et al. 2015; Xing 2006) and to support linguistic progress, promoting the understanding of the context of the FL, its development and appropriate use (Gabbianelli 2020). Besides, motivation can be sustained through specific methods and different activities, chosen and adapted to fit the context, meet students’ needs and interests and, of course, align with the aim of the course (Gabbianelli, Formica 2017; Romagnoli 2019).

4.2 Student-Centred Learning and Teaching

Student-Centred Learning and Teaching (hereafter SCLT) is praised by students and educational researchers (Grøndahl Glavind et al. 2023). An exhaustive definition of SCLT is that

Student-centred education focuses on the idea of the active student[s] being the primary architect of their learning in contrast to teacher-centred education that highlights the teacher’s role and expertise. (Mascolo 2009 cit. in Grøndahl Glavind et al. 2023, 1248)

The student-centred approach to teaching and learning is primarily based on active rather than passive learning, with a strong emphasis on deep understanding and critical engagement. It also promotes greater responsibility and accountability on the part of students, fosters learner autonomy, and encourages a mutual relationship between teachers and learners (Lea et al. 2003 in O’Neil, McMahon 2005). These characteristics proved to be fully consistent with the organization of the course and contributed significantly to enhancing students’ cooperation, motivation, and engagement.

4.3 International Class

Internationalization³ has been described as the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education (Knight 2004).

³ For a thorough analysis of the definitions, approaches and methods of internationalization in higher education see Knight 2004 and Costa, Murphy 2018.

As reported by Costa and Murphy (2005, 602), “Working with international students can provide opportunities for wonderfully enriching teaching experiences”. As a matter of fact, an international class is the right place to encourage cooperation among students with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, promoting language acquisition, cultural exchange, and mutual enrichment. Teaching in international classes is also a great opportunity for a teacher.

5 The Course

The course, a workshop-based module devoted to Chinese literature, was held in the second semester and it consisted of 20 academic hours. It combined teacher-led lectures with small-group cooperative learning activities on a topic chosen by the instructors, that was ‘Women and their relationship with men’ (*Nǚrén yǔ nánrén de guanxi* 女人与男人的关系) (§5.2). Participation, which was linked to an optional literature examination covering ancient and modern Chinese literature, required students to engage actively through regular attendance and independent work conducted outside the classroom in order to develop a final project to be presented to their peers and teachers.

5.1 Students and Teachers

The group of students consisted of four native Chinese speakers and seven native Italian speakers studying Chinese. The Italian students had different language proficiency levels, ranging from the second year of the bachelor’s degree to the second year of the master’s degree. The Chinese students had a B1/B2 level of Italian, as they had obtained a bachelor’s degree in this language in China; thus, even if they were not in Italy to explicitly study Italian, they used it as the medium of instruction and communication in the university setting and everyday life.

The presence of Chinese and Italian students provided the opportunity to form bilingual working groups for the cooperative work conducted out of class and prior to the in-class presentations. Students were divided into three groups, each composed of three or four students, each including at least one Chinese student. This choice was made to promote cooperation and exchange between students, both at the linguistic and cultural level. For example, some cultural content is more immediately accessible to native speakers than to FL learners. Besides, cooperative work has been shown to effectively promote motivation (Anderson, Palmer 2001; Brophy 1987;

Slavin 1996; Johnson, Johnson 2009 cit. in Tran 2019), an important aspect to consider when working with young students.

The course was taught by a team of two native Italian-speaking teachers and one native Chinese-speaking teacher. The composition of the teaching staff was due to a fortunate set of circumstances, as courses are not typically assigned so many instructors. As discussed later in Section 5.3, the teachers, as well as the students, adopted a flexible use of Italian and Chinese.

5.2 Theme and Teaching Materials

The general topic addressed in the course, ‘Women and their relationship with men’ (*Nǚrén yǔ nánrén de guānxi* 女人与男人的关系), was selected for its broad scope, cultural richness, and potential to establish connections across different cultural contexts. The relationship between women and men both in ancient times and modern and contemporary times in China is a subject that offers abundant opportunities for research, comparison and analysis, providing valuable insights into the understanding of different cultures. Therefore, it was the focus of all the teaching materials chosen for both lectures and students’ presentations.

The decision to adopt a broad subject was motivated by two major considerations: the possibility of relating it to different cultural backgrounds and the need to find suitable teaching materials among Chinese literary texts, movies, and TV dramas. Identifying appropriate teaching and learning resources is not easy; for example, the materials should adapt as much as possible to students’ different language proficiency levels, be sufficiently engaging, and stimulate reflection so as to maintain students’ motivation and engagement.

Teaching materials used by the teachers during their lectures and given to the students for the cooperative work were in Chinese. Thus, to facilitate students’ access to these materials in their original language, which could be very challenging, the activities were all guided by the instructors. As a matter of fact, during the teacher-led lectures, instructors provided the historical-cultural and literary contexts as well as language analysis (for example syntactic structures, culturally significant words, idiomatic expressions, cultural insights, and intercultural comparisons) related to the assigned materials. In fact, they reflected different historical and cultural contexts, while the Chinese language itself conveyed meaning related to the period of production or setting of the literary texts, movies or TV dramas. For their group work, students not only were assigned selected teaching materials, but they were also guided to specific elements for analysis. In addition, the teachers also provided other resources, such

as academic papers, Chinese literature and culture books, literary criticism related to relevant themes and aspects.⁴

The choice of the literary texts fell on Zhang Jie's (2024) short story *Ài, shì bù néng wàngjì de* 爱, 是不能忘记的 (Love Cannot Be Forgotten) for teacher-led lectures and the first chapter of the novel *Cháng hèn gē* 长恨歌 (The Song of Everlasting Sorrow) by Wang Anyi (2019) for students' in-class presentations. It is important to underline that the literary texts were selected due to their remarkable linguistic and cultural richness, as well as their capacity to offer a wide range of insights for critical reflection. They served as effective starting points for the analytical work conducted within the students' small-group discussions and for teacher-led lectures. Moreover, Zhang Jie's short story and Wang Anyi's novel published translations in Italian⁵ are available, an element that considerably helped the cross-linguistic and cultural analysis among both Italian students and Chinese students.

As for the video materials, the movie *Hóng dēnglóng gāogāo guà* 红灯笼高高挂 (Raise the Red Lantern) by Zhang Yimou (1991) and the TV drama *Lǐzhì pái shēnghuó* 理智派生活 (The Rational Life) directed by Xu Fujun (2021) were presented by the teachers. The Chinese movie *Mùlán* 木兰 (Mulan) by Ma Chucheng (2009) and the TV drama *Sānshí ér yǐ* 三十而已 (Nothing but Thirty) directed by Zhang Xiaobo (2020) were proposed for students' presentations.

5.3 Vehicular Languages

Three main reasons guided the choice of the vehicular languages to be used: the aim of the course, that was fostering intercultural communicative competence while simultaneously promoting linguistic and cultural progress, the inclusion of both Italian and native Chinese-speaking students with varying levels of proficiency in the respective L2s, as well as the presence of a team of Italian and native Chinese-speaking teachers in charge of the course.

For these reasons, it was decided to adopt a flexible use of Italian and Chinese: both languages could be used by the teachers and by the students. During the teacher-led lectures, the two languages could be employed within the same class. In other cases, a lesson might be conducted entirely in one language. During presentations, students could alternate the two languages.

In this context, the exclusive use of Italian would not have served the main purpose, i.e. the integration of Chinese language and culture; furthermore, it would have been too difficult for the Chinese

⁴ See Pedone, Zuccheri 2015; Pesaro, Pirazzoli 2019; Rossi, Rambaldini 2021.

⁵ Pedone, Zuccheri 2015, 119-23; 237-40.

students to understand all the content. Similarly, the exclusive use of Chinese would have created some comprehension problems for the Italian students. This background, supported by the aim of the course and by the assumptions that the language class is a bilingual environment (Gilardoni 2015) and that “Any language learner is an incipient bilingual. Any bilingual is or was a language learner” (Byram 2000, 84), led to the decision of switching between the two languages to ensure that “more learning will take place than if the switch had not taken place” (Macaro 2009, 81).

In addition, the presence of a Chinese native-speaking teacher, who conducted most of the teaching in Chinese, proved to be a valuable pedagogical resource, particularly for the Italian students. It allowed them to engage more directly with culturally embedded aspects of the language while also improving their listening comprehension and overall language skills. On the other hand, the use of both Italian and Chinese by the Italian instructors was helpful for both Italian and Chinese students: the former were able to deepen their understanding of Chinese language and culture while also addressing potential comprehension gaps; the latter benefited from instruction in Italian, which helped strengthen their Italian language proficiency.

5.4 Activities

As mentioned above, the course adopted a multimethod approach that combines teacher-led lectures with students’ in-class presentations, resulting from the cooperative work conducted outside the classroom.

The teachers delivered the first seven lessons (14 academic hours), to provide students with new linguistic and cultural content and to familiarize them with the topic and the types of teaching materials they were expected to work on autonomously. During these sessions, supported by PowerPoint presentations, the teachers introduced the historical, cultural, and literary contexts, along with an analysis of salient linguistic and cultural features of the materials under study. As previously explained (§ 5.3), the teachers adopted a flexible use of Italian and Chinese, alternating between the two languages within the same lesson or across different sessions. During the Chinese colleague’s lessons, the Italian teachers provided support whenever students had comprehension difficulties.

After an introduction to the main theme of the course (§5.2), teachers focused on the three selected cultural products – the short story *Love Cannot Be Forgotten*, the movie *Raise the Red Lantern* and the TV drama *The Rational Life* – addressing their historical and socio-cultural context, the linguistic and cultural dimensions, as well as the distinctive features of each one. Due to space limitations, we cannot present here all the activities and lesson content of the teacher-led classes; therefore,

we use the work carried out on the movie *Raise the Red Lantern* as an illustrative example. Comparable activities were then implemented for the other cultural materials under study, each specifically contextualized and tailored to their respective characteristics.

The movie *Raise the Red Lantern* was first introduced by one of the Italian instructors, who provided contextual information such as the director, the plot, the setting, as well as its relationship to the novel *Qīqiè chéng qún* 妻妾成群 (Wives and Concubines) by Su Tong,⁶ from which it was adapted. The introduction also addressed specific cultural elements, such as foot massage or the lighting of the lanterns as well as broader themes including the dehumanization of women, arranged marriage, and gender inequality. The Chinese teacher showed relevant scenes of the movie, explaining some linguistic and cultural related meanings. For instance, it was highlighted the intentional use of colors: apart from the red lanterns, the movie is dominated by black, white, and grey tones (*hēi bái huī* 黑白灰). Attention was given to the evolution of the protagonist's clothing: the student outfit from the opening scenes reappears at the end, when she loses her sanity. The soundtrack, inspired by Peking opera, shifts between slower and faster rhythms depending on the scene. Theme-related idiomatic expressions such as *zhòng nán qīng nǚ* 重男轻女,⁷ together with culturally significant linguistic forms like the verbs *jià* 嫁 and *qǔ* 娶, were also analyzed.

As for students' autonomous work, they were expected to engage in collaborative activities on the assigned teaching materials (*The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, the movie *Mulan* and the TV drama *Nothing but Thirty*) to produce a final output. Their presentations, supported by PowerPoint slides, covered the final three classes (six academic hours). All groups presented their work in both languages: Italian students mainly used Chinese, while Chinese students mainly used Italian. In practice, the students' work followed the same structure adopted in class by the teachers, beginning with contextual information to frame each work and then proceeding to linguistic and cultural analysis, with the support of their native-speaking peers. Due to space limitations, selected examples of students' work are presented here to show how they engaged with both the linguistic *and* cultural dimensions of the assigned resources. These examples demonstrate that both language and culture were simultaneous object of study.

As can be seen from some the slides, the integration of language and culture was achieved on many levels: in the first slide [fig. 1], students from the group working on Wang Anyi's novel reflected on the history of the city of Shanghai with both reference to the past (as a concession) and to the present (as the business center of China), but also in terms of

⁶ The novel was published in China in 1990.

⁷ The meaning of *zhòng nán qīng nǚ* is 'regard men as superior to women'.

its primary role as a character of Wang Anyi's novel. In the second slide [fig. 2], while analyzing the language, students come across expressions used by Wang Anyi for narrative and descriptive purposes, which nonetheless refer to aspects of Chinese culture, in particular traditional arts (*xì gōngbǐ* 细工笔).⁸



Figure 1 Students' presentations

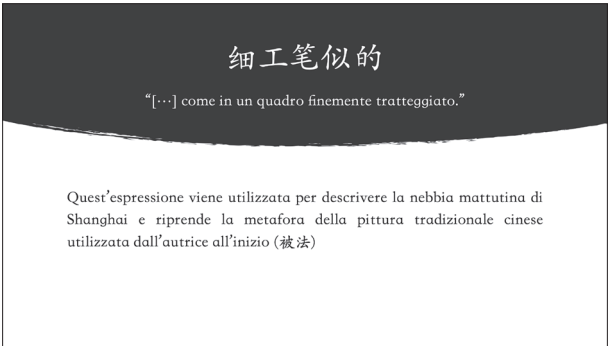


Figure 2 Students' PPT presentations

Students of the group working on the TV drama *Nothing but Thirty* got in touch with some cultural-related issues focusing on language use

⁸ The meaning of *xì gōngbǐ* is 'meticulous brushwork'. Gongbi is an ancient Chinese painting technique known for its precision and the elegance of its fine details.

[fig. 3],⁹ but they also got familiar with the Chinese social phenomenon of 'leftover women' (*sheng nǚ* 剩女),¹⁰ as showed in the slide [fig. 4].



Figure 3 Students' presentations



Figure 4 Students' presentations

6 Concluding Remarks

The teaching experiment described, showed the value of literature, movies and TV dramas as teaching tools employed to develop students' intercultural communicative competence thanks to their natural characteristic of embedding language and culture.

⁹ *hù 沪* is the abbreviated form of Shanghai, commonly seen on vehicle license plates, while *piāo 漂* means 'to float' or 'to drift.' The term *Hù piào 沪漂* is used to describe people who 'drift' or move to Shanghai in search of job opportunities.

¹⁰ *Sheng nǚ* is an expression belonging to the so called *liú xíng cí* 流行词 ('vogue word'), used to describe educated, successful, and independent urban women who are unmarried by their early 30s.

The peer-based structure of the activities, involving collaboration both among teachers and among students, as well as the alternating use of Italian and Chinese facilitated access to Chinese, while mixed groups with both native Chinese-speaking and Italian students leveraged complementary expertise and supported mutual enrichment. In addition, positioning cultural products as both tools and objects of study contributed to linguistic and cultural enrichment while enhancing learners' motivation to study.

All these characteristics could offer a replicable template for CFL programs seeking to bridge the divide between 'language' and 'culture' courses. As a matter of fact, the aim of the paper is not to offer scientific data or empirical results, but to provide an example for future projects focused on the integration of language and culture in the CFL classroom. We are aware that the course was organized in a rather specific context; nevertheless, certain features may offer valuable insights and be adapted for similar educational experiences aimed at fostering intercultural communicative competence through the simultaneous acquisition of language and culture.

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