

Title: Robust Chinese E-learning: Integrating the 5 Cs Principles with Content and Technology¹

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Abstract: This paper will discuss how to blend technology with the 5 Cs principles of the US National Standards for Foreign Language Learning - *Communication, Cultures, Comparisons, Connections and Communities* - in the pursuit of robust Chinese e-learning. A wedding banquet online module which we developed at Carnegie Mellon University is discussed as an example of how to integrate the 5 Cs Principles with content and technology to provide an effective and interesting Chinese language and culture e-learning experience.

題目: 強化華語文網上教學: 結合五大原則, 內容及科技

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關鍵字: 華語文網上設計與教學, 中文網頁, 數位學習, 五大原則, 全國外語學習標準, 婚禮喜宴, 中國文化, 中國食物, 交際應酬

摘要: 本篇論文主要是以美國的全國外語學習的五大原則為指標, 討論如何整合內容與科技, 期以強化華語文的網上教學。此五大原則是: 溝通, 文化, 比較, 連接與社區。我們以在卡內基美濃大學所設計發展的婚禮喜宴網頁為例, 予以介紹網頁的設計理念, 內容選材及實務應用。希望能藉此網頁, 提供一個有效, 有趣的華語文網上設計與教學。

1.0 Introduction

Robust language learning requires a learning environment and resources that facilitate effective and efficient learning. Such an environment should incorporate the 5 Cs principles of the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning, facilitate customization and individualization, and allow the instructor to efficiently partner with the student to work toward their language goals (Wu 2001).

1.1 The 5 Cs Principles of the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning

The 5 Cs principles are part of the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning developed by a coalition of national language organizations in the United States to guide language learning in the 21st century (*ACTFL*, 1999). The 5 Cs principles are an excellent reference for designing and creating foreign language teaching materials. For example, the 5 Cs principles are adopted by a new Chinese textbook called *Chinese Link: 中文天地* which was designed and created by Carnegie Mellon University faculty. ²

The 5 Cs - *Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities* - represent 5 goal areas that encompass all the various reasons for studying a foreign language. *Communication*, the heart of language learning, is the ability to communicate in languages other than English. To develop communicative competence in a foreign language, knowledge of vocabulary and syntactic patterns alone are insufficient; students should also develop knowledge and understanding of other *Cultures* (Wu 2004). *Connections* are the ties to other disciplines and bodies of knowledge that are enabled by foreign language study. Through *Comparisons* and contrasts between languages and cultures students can become more aware of their own language and culture and more tolerant of the cultural differences inherent in diverse socio-cultural contexts. Finally, these elements together enable students to participate in multilingual *Communities*.

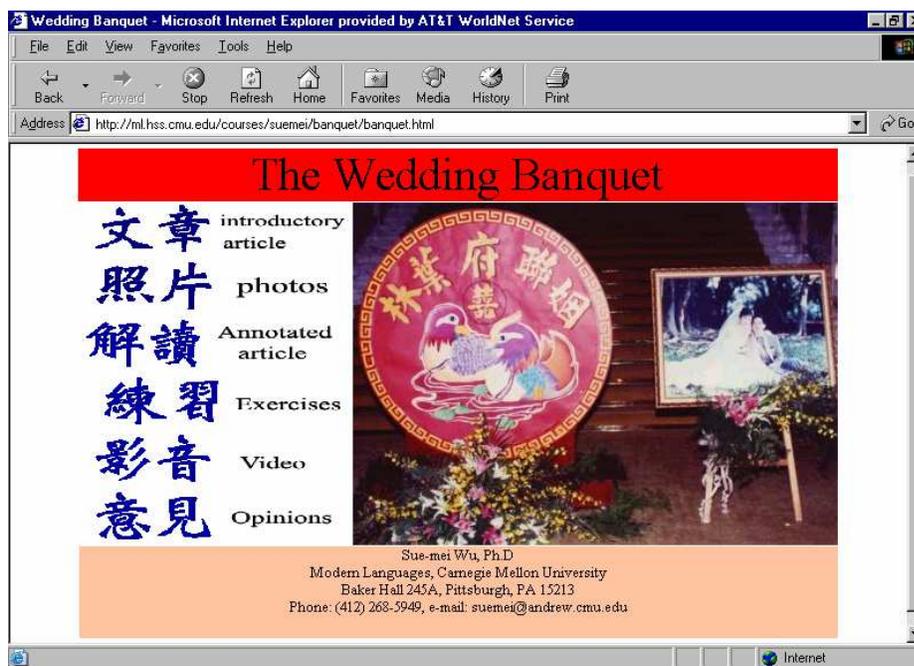
1.2 Individualization and Teamwork between Student and Instructor

In addition to attention to the 5 Cs principles, we believe that an effective e-learning environment should be learner-centered, that is, it should be focused on students' individual needs, goals and proficiency, and should enable the instructor to act as a facilitator to guide students toward their language goals. The relation between the instructor and students should be one of teamwork, working together to reach the expectations of both (Wu 1998, 2002).

2.0 The Wedding banquet Module ³

The Wedding Banquet 喜宴

URL: <http://ml.hss.cmu.edu/courses/suemei/banquet/banquet.html>



This section presents a customized online module developed at Carnegie Mellon University that takes advantage of technology in order to incorporate the 5 Cs principles and enable customization to fit the needs of individual students. The module helps learners develop their communicative competence in Chinese language, improve their understanding of Chinese culture, compare aspects of different cultures, and connect to other sources of knowledge through participation in multilingual communities.

One of the most important and difficult aspects of learning Chinese culture is introducing students to how native speakers engage with and interact among their acquaintances. Chinese people have subtle and detailed patterns of engagement in social matters that are heavily influenced by relative social status, relationships and practical concerns. The wedding banquet is a common occasion in Chinese societies which provides a good example to illustrate how Chinese people interact with their classmates, friends, colleagues and relatives. It is very rich in Chinese culture, social interactions, food and traditions. The wedding banquet module will illustrate these cultural elements and show how elements of Chinese culture are reflected in the language.

2.1 Content Description

The basic content of the online module consists of readings, discussion, and cultural information supplemented by photos, audio, and video segments from the authors' fieldwork. The various components of the module are described in more detail in the sections below.

2.2 The Introductory Essay

The module will begin with an introductory essay, to be read without references, followed by a comprehension exercise. This will allow us to benchmark the level of the students before they encounter the rest of the learning activities included in the module.

The introductory reading will be followed by the main readings, which are designed to provide students with a self-learning activity. Selected vocabulary items in the main readings are hyper-linked to glosses of their pronunciation and meaning, so that students can do close reading without using time to look up characters in the dictionary. The readings are designed to include vocabulary items from the most-commonly-used 2000 characters, as well as an overview of the foundation grammatical patterns for intermediate to advanced level students. The readings will be supplemented by related pictures and video, and will have links to sound files of native speakers reading them aloud.

The main readings are stories describing the characters attending different wedding banquets, including why they are invited to these occasions, their reactions to them, and how they try to act so that they exhibit appropriate manners in Chinese society. Three different wedding occasions are described in the readings: in a very fancy hotel; an outdoor banquet and at a regular restaurant. These three wedding banquets share similarities, but they also have differences which reflect variations in social status, atmosphere and family dignity.

The culture and social interactions reflected in the stories indicate how Chinese people interact with their acquaintances differently according to their different social circles and statuses as relatives, co-workers or friends. Determining the amount of the cash gift in the red envelope is a learned art; the amount has to be just right to reflect the relationship between the host and the guests. Determining the amount of the cash gift also reflects how Chinese people are quite sensitive to the sounds of the language, indicating the close relationship between the language and culture. For example, wedding guests would need to choose lucky, even numbers and avoid odd numbers and the number sì 四 "four" which is a homophone of sǐ 死 "to die" in Chinese. The behavior of wedding guests needs to appropriately reflect courtesy so that all parties can maintain their honor, dignity, and face.

The readings also describe the different settings and entertainment programs used for cheerful and prosperous occasions. The various settings and guests reflect the host's social circles, political and social status. Government VIPs and famous people are invited to one of the wedding banquets. Their presence promotes the family's social status.

The readings will provide the student with important building blocks for language and culture acquisition. Described below, subsequent components of the online modules will require students to practice their new vocabulary and language skills, and use them to engage in listening, writing, and discussion related to the Chinese wedding banquet.

2.3 Special Chinese Language for the Wedding Banquet Occasion

An annotated list of the most commonly used wedding banquet vocabulary, lucky words and phrases is presented to illustrate concepts of the ideal Chinese family. The

vocabulary items are incorporated into the main essay. The lucky words and phrases are usually rhymed with each other or are homophonic words which express that the new couple is an excellent match; wish them a happy and wonderful marriage; and express the hope that they can love each other and work together to establish a wonderful family. Included also are some examples of Chinese wedding banquet invitation cards, both a traditional simple one and a newer fancy style. The invitation cards present a formal written format and genre. Moreover, Chinese people prefer to make new beginnings on a lucky date. The Farmer's Calendar 農民曆, which indicates lucky dates, is usually consulted when scheduling a wedding banquet. This is different from U.S. culture where weddings are usually scheduled on weekends for convenience.

2.4 Banquet Food

Food is of the utmost importance to Chinese, and in most cases the foods served at a Chinese wedding banquet are quite fancy. A typical banquet will include around 12 courses. During the banquet, guests sit at their tables, watch the proceedings, chat, and enjoy the food. With the decorations and the big crowd, the atmosphere is very cheerful and prosperous.

In addition to being a very important aspect of Chinese social engagements, Chinese food and cooking are also two of the most interesting and fascinating topics for learners of Chinese. The module presents photographs of several dishes from a wedding banquet, many of them having important symbolic meaning related to happiness, wealth and fertility. The dishes are decorated with red, and round shapes are prevalent. Red is the color for happiness, so serving dishes with some red components (such as shrimp, crabs, lobsters, or foods colored with red food coloring) signifies joy and celebration. Round shape symbolizes perfection and completeness in Chinese culture. The rice balls, fish balls or meatballs served at the banquet symbolize an ideal marriage as being perfect, like an unbroken circle formed by a continuous line. Following are some other important foods which are introduced in the module along with their symbolic meanings:

Dragon-Phoenix plates 龍鳳呈祥: The wedding banquet usually starts with appetizers such as "dragon-phoenix" plates or cold plates. In a marriage, the dragon symbolizes the male role while the phoenix symbolizes the female role. (Lobster in Chinese is literally called "dragon shrimp", and chicken feet are referred to as "phoenix feet". Lobster and chicken both are prevalent in the menu to symbolize the new couple.

Desserts: Desserts symbolize both a sweet life for the couple and the desire of Chinese people to have an ideal marriage that produces heirs. Common dessert components include the following: lizi 栗子 "Chestnuts", a homophone of lizi 立子 "to establish a son"; zaozi 棗子 "dried dates", a homophone of zaozi 早子 to "have a son soon", and lianzi 蓮子 "lotus seeds", a homophone of lianzi 連子 "to continue to have sons".

Huasheng 花生 "peanuts" includes the word sheng 生 "to be born, to give birth to".

Guiyuan 桂圓 "dried longan" is a homophone of guiyuan 貴圓 (富貴, 圓滿) "honorable, wealthy and satisfactory". Finally, one of the most famous and commonly served desserts is called zao sheng gui zi 早生貴子 (zao 早 is from zaozi 棗子 "dried date"; sheng 生 is from huasheng 花生 "peanut"; gui 貴 is from guiyuan 桂圓 dried longan and zi 子 is from lianzi 蓮子 lotus seed). This dish is served to wish the new couple to "give birth to an honorable son soon".

Chicken: Ji 雞 "chicken" is a homophone of jia 家 "family" in some dialects (e.g. The Southern Min dialect and Cantonese), so the chicken dishes symbolize establishing a family.

Fish: Serving fish expresses hope that the couple will experience a life together with abundance, niannian youyu 年年有餘 "have surplus every year", because yu 魚 "fish" shares the same sound as yu 餘 "plentiful, surplus" in Chinese. Please note that Chinese prefer to serve the whole fish to symbolize wholeness and completeness rather than serving filets.

Delicacies : Some delicacies are provided. They indicate wealth because they are typically very expensive. For the guests and the new couple, eating these delicacies expresses the wish that they all will be wealthy.

Farewell Treats: As the time draws near for the guests to depart, the couple and their parents and close relatives will stand in line at the door to thank the guests and wish them well as they leave. The bride will hold a plate of candies and cigarettes for the guests. Candies represent a happy and sweet life for the couple. The cigarettes are for the male guests. Sometimes the groom will light the cigarettes for the male guests, showing his appreciation for them coming.

2.5 Banquet Decorations

Banquet decorations are characterized by red, gold, flowers and the double happiness character xi 囍, a symbol composed of two "happiness" characters side by side. This symbol represents the wish that the two newlyweds will have happiness together. The double happiness graph is a special Chinese character used only to represent marital happiness. A symbol with two Mandarin ducks, called luan yang 鴛鴦, is also frequently seen at wedding banquets. The two Mandarin ducks symbolize love and a happy marriage. It is also very common to have a large studio wedding picture of the bride and groom displayed in the entrance so that the guests may admire the beautiful couple.

2.6 Visual Aids and Audiovisual Segments

The module includes photos and video segments from the authors' fieldwork. Their purpose is to allow the learners to see what wedding banquets are like in modern Chinese society. They include the banquet food, decorations, and important interactions

among banquet participants. Audio and video components are converted to a streaming media format and embedded in web pages so that they can be viewed by students at times convenient to them, and repeated as desired by the students. They also are supplemented with vocabulary lists or transcripts of difficult sections, and notes on grammatical structures and rhetorical strategies used by the native speakers.

This section of the module will provide students with a concentrated learning opportunity. They will have a head start at understanding what they see and hear, since they have already studied the reading materials. Thus, they are able to focus on more advanced language features, such as how native Chinese speakers combine sentences, form arguments, agree and disagree, or provide emphasis. Moreover, students are able to watch or listen to the segments repeatedly to reinforce their learning.

2.7 Exercises

Interactive and personalized reading comprehension, grammar and vocabulary exercises are provided so that students can review and test their mastery of the language skills highlighted in the readings. The correct answers and some feedback are provided immediately to the students after they complete the exercises. The results of the exercises are submitted to the instructor automatically via e-mail. They are also stored automatically in a database so that instructors can study how the exercises are being used, and track the progress of their students. It is hoped that the database information will also be used to further customize the content of the exercises dynamically to fit each student's individual strengths and weaknesses.

2.8 Online bulletin board system for discussions:

We also set up an online bulletin board system so that students can use Chinese (advanced or intermediate level) or English (Elementary level) to discuss and share their opinions on the wedding banquet occasions presented. The discussion topics include personal reactions to the Chinese wedding banquet, comparisons across cultures, students' experiences or stories they have heard, critiques and suggestions.

2.9 Technologies Utilized

Technologies used to develop these modules include HTML supplemented with client-side programming in JavaScript, and server-side programming in PHP. Sound and Video files are stored in a streaming media format, which helps to avoid long loading times for the web pages.

Students will use Chinese language software to view the web pages and input Chinese in the exercises, unless they are using an operating system or environment which already has Chinese language support. The modules will be supplemented with instructions for acquiring and using the software necessary to view and input Chinese online.

3.0 Concluding Remarks

Web technologies offer exciting potential for the design and delivery of modules to support language and culture learning. We have described an online wedding banquet module that takes advantage of that potential to provide learning experiences that support the 5 Cs principles and presentation of Chinese language and culture content, and enable personalization and customization of the learning experience.

Notes:

1. We would like to thank the Maurice and Laura Falk Foundation, Carnegie Mellon University, for supporting the Wedding Banquet module development. We would also like to thank the Pittsburgh Science of Learning Center (PSLC, sponsored by NSF, URL: <http://www.learnlab.org>) for supporting the development of a Chinese online course at CMU. Some of our ideas for this paper have been shaped and revised while working on the online course.

2. *Chinese Link: 中文天地 (Elementary Chinese)* By Sue-mei Wu, Yueming Yu, Yanhui Zhang & Weizhong Tian. Prentice Hall Publisher. 2005.

This section from the preface explains how the 5 Cs are integrated into the text:

Recognizing that the world is becoming increasingly interlinked and globalized, the goal of the *Chinese Link: 中文天地 (Elementary Chinese)* project has been to integrate the "5Cs" principles of the National Standards for Foreign Language Education - Communication, Cultures, Comparisons, Connections and Communities - throughout the program in order to provide a new approach for the teaching and learning of Chinese language in the 21st century. The program aims to help beginners develop their communicative competence in the four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, while gaining competence in Chinese culture, exercising their ability to compare aspects of different cultures, making connections to their daily life and building links among communities.

3. This Wedding Banquet module was supported by a grant awarded by The Maurice and Laura Falk Foundation, Carnegie Mellon University. Project Title: "The Chinese Wedding Banquet: An Online Module for Teaching Chinese Language, Culture and Social Engagement". Spring 2003.

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