

## New Tasks and New Paths for Confucius Institutes in Communication of Chinese Culture: Taking the Practice of Confucius Institute of University of French Polynesia as An Example

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### Abstract

The international situation and the requirements for Chinese national development in the new era have placed renewed and higher demands on the overseas communication of Chinese culture. Confucius Institutes, with their important mission of disseminating Chinese culture, are also facing new tasks and urgently need to explore new paths for Chinese cultural communication. This article will take the example of the Confucius Institute of University of French Polynesia (UPF) to explore the new paths of Chinese cultural communication from diverse perspectives, cultural teaching models and content innovation, and the digital transformation of cultural communication.

**Key words:** Chinese culture communication; Task; Path; Confucius Institute of UPF

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### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, with China's continuous development and its increasing international influence, the role of the Chinese language in international exchanges has become more and more prominent. Thus, the enthusiasm of people around the world to learn the Chinese language

and understand Chinese culture continues to rise, with increasingly demand for personalized, differentiated and diversified Chinese culture communication. The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China stressed that it should speed up the construction of Chinese discourse and narrative system, tell Chinese stories well, spread Chinese voices well, and present a credible, lovely and respectable image of China. In December 2022, Chinese President Xi Jinping (2022) also pointed out in a signed article published in the Saudi Arabian media that the diversity of world civilizations should be respected, that we should "strive to replace estrangement and clash of civilizations with exchanges and mutual learning, promote understanding and affinity between our peoples, and build 'a garden of civilizations' featuring mutual appreciation and inspiration." These pronouncements set forth the basic requirements for building a socialist culture with Chinese characteristics and for exchanges and mutual learning among diverse civilizations. They fully demonstrate China's global vision, mind and responsibility as a major country. They have strong attraction, appeal and vitality. In this process, as an important institution for teaching the Chinese language and disseminating Chinese culture, Confucius Institutes play an important role as a bridge. Over the years, Confucius Institutes have taken Chinese language education and Chinese cultural communication around the world as their mission. They have always used language and culture as the carrier to promote cultural and people-to-people exchanges between China and other countries, and the development of diverse and colorful human civilizations. By January 2023, a total of 487 Confucius Institutes and more than 1,000 Confucius classrooms have been set up around the world, benefiting nearly 10 million Chinese language learners and more than 100 million people who have experienced Chinese culture. This has led more than 80 countries to incorporate Chinese

language teaching into their national education systems<sup>1</sup>, giving a strong boost to the global “China craze” and “Chinese language craze”, which continues to rise. What’s more, it also conforms to the general background and trend of building a global community with a shared future for mankind.

The new era of development not only puts forward new tasks for Confucius Institutes but also brings new opportunities for their development. This paper will first clarify the new tasks of Chinese cultural communication in the new era, and combine the practical experience of the Confucius Institute of Chinese Foreign Affairs University-University of French Polynesia (hereinafter referred to as the Confucius Institute of CFAU-UPF) in the process of disseminating Chinese culture, and put forward new ideas and new paths for Chinese cultural communication.

## 1. NEW TASKS FACING CONFUCIUS INSTITUTES TO SPREAD CHINESE CULTURE IN THE NEW ERA

At present, in the context of the new mission of “telling China’s story well” and promoting people-to-people exchanges all around the world, the task of Confucius Institutes for Chinese culture communication is facing many new requirements. Based on the latest requirements of Chinese cultural communication in the field of international Chinese education, combined with the actual work and experience during the tenure of Confucius Institutes, the author tries to summarize three new tasks faced by Confucius Institutes in the process of spreading Chinese culture.

First of all, the cultural communication of Confucius Institutes calls for telling of Chinese stories well from a more diversified perspective by expanding the understanding and identification of Chinese culture among those who know China well from the perspective of cultural commonality. Confucius Institutes, which shoulder the responsibility of cultural education and communication, are an important link in fulfilling the task of telling Chinese stories well, as well as an important way to show a true, three-dimensional and comprehensive image of China. However, the actual cultural teaching and communication often highlight the uniqueness of Chinese culture (especially traditional culture), while ignoring the integrity of Chinese culture (especially contemporary Chinese culture and society) as an organic part of world culture, as well as the commonality and affinity between Chinese culture and other cultures in the world (Guo, 2023). Therefore, to realize the great goal of people-to-people exchanges between China and the rest of the world

in the process of cultural education and communication, it should simultaneously take into account the traditional Chinese culture and the actual conditions of contemporary China, fully combine the tradition and uniqueness of culture with the contemporary and universal nature, showing that in the process of China going global, the Chinese civilization is also an organic part of the world civilization. China and the world have a commonality in many fields such as culture, which will enhance the acceptance of Chinese culture to foreign friends, and then further stimulate the initiative of foreigners to understand and learn from the Chinese model and experience.

Secondly, the objectives of the cultural education of Confucius Institutes should further diversify, from cultural knowledge dabble and experience to cultural understanding, cross-cultural awareness and cultural attitude cultivation. Cultural teaching is an important way for Confucius Institutes to carry out cultural communication. The traditional teaching of Chinese as a foreign language, mainly focuses on knowledge transference, the involvement and experience of cultural content, that is, focusing on the problem of “what learners know” (Zu, 2023). However, according to the latest characteristics and requirements of international Chinese education, cultural teaching should establish the dominant position of Chinese learners and pay full attention to the comprehensive cultivation of Chinese learners’ abilities (MOE, 2021). Based on this, the newly issued *Application and Interpretation Book of the Framework of Reference for Chinese Culture and Society Teaching in International Chinese Language* summarizes the objectives of cultural teaching into four dimensions: cultural knowledge, cultural understanding, cross-cultural awareness and cultural attitude, which fully demonstrates the new understanding of cultural education and communication in the international Chinese education community in the new era (CLEC, 2022).

At the same time, the cultural communication of Confucius Institutes in the new era is also facing the new issue of digital and information transformation. In recent years, according to the latest development requirements of international Chinese language education, Confucius Institutes need to strengthen the integration of digitalization and information technology in many fields, including cultural communication. This requirement has become more and more obvious after the global COVID-19 pandemic. A large number of courses have been transferred online. While putting forward new challenges on teachers’ adaptability and network hardware and software conditions, higher requirements are also put forward for the construction speed and scale of digital and information-based teaching resources in order to improve the adaptability to online remote teaching forms. However, looking at the current situation of digital teaching resource construction, the number and categories of digital

<sup>1</sup> The data comes from the China International Chinese Language Education Foundation and the 2022 International Chinese Language Education Conference.

teaching resources available for Confucius Institutes are still very limited. According to the data contained in *International Chinese Language Teaching Resources Development Report* (2021), digital teaching resources in the field of international Chinese education are seriously insufficient at present, accounting for only 18.8% of the total published teaching resources. Among them, most are based on language itself, while resources targeting cultural content are even rarer (CLEC, 2022). It is time to accelerate the digital upgrading and transformation of China's cultural communication resources.

In response to the above new tasks, the Chinese team of the Confucius Institute of UPF, where the author works, has proposed new paths for Chinese cultural communication under the background of the new tasks by active exploration and carried out many practices accordingly. The following will focus on these attempts, the achievements and experiences of path exploration, in order to provide new ideas for the communication of Chinese culture in Confucius Institutes.

## 2. INTRODUCTION TO THE BASIC SITUATION OF CHINESE CULTURE COMMUNICATION AT CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE OF UPF

French Polynesia, also known as Tahiti Island, is an overseas territory of France located in the South Pacific. In 2013, the Confucius Institute jointly built by the Chinese Foreign Affairs University and the University of French Polynesia was officially inaugurated. Although far away from China, French Polynesia has a long history of "China affection". As early as 4000 BC or even earlier, China's ancient residents from areas including Shanghai and Fujian, settled and multiplied here after long-distance migration. In the late Qing Dynasty, many immigrants from Shenzhen and Dongguan in Guangdong Province came, established their own homes, and gradually integrated with the local people. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the local Chinese in French Polynesia continued to maintain close and friendly relations with the people of the motherland. China's *Yuanwang* research ship to the Antarctic expedition, the route here, many times called the port of Papeete, and established friendly relations with the local Chinese. Today, in the roster of Confucius Institute students, many surnames originated from Chinese can still be seen, although "alphabetized", such as Lau (Liu), Mu, Thie (Cai) and so on. It can be imagined that while gradually integrating with the local people, the earlier immigrants also brought the Chinese language and culture to this area.

In the new era, the French Polynesian people, especially the youngsters, not only have a deep attachment to the language and culture of their ancestors but also

based on their own learning and perception, have a new enthusiasm for Chinese culture, which is embodied in the following two aspects.

On the one hand, the French Polynesian people view China's development positively and take the initiative to learn from China's development process and experience. As mentioned above, the communication of Chinese culture by Confucius Institutes in the new era should take into account both traditional Chinese culture and the actual conditions of contemporary China to show a true, three-dimensional and comprehensive image of China. In French Polynesia, the Confucius Institute students show great interest in learning about the national conditions of contemporary China. Besides traditional Chinese culture, they also look forward to learning and understanding the development process and experience of contemporary China. For example, before the start of the autumn semester of 2021, a number of Confucius Institute students contacted the Chinese teaching team through the secretary, hoping to introduce relevant content about the development of the People's Republic of China in Chinese culture course, while arranging the teaching content of traditional Chinese culture. They said that they admire from the bottom of their heart the successful experiences such as the continuous development of China's economy, enhancement of comprehensive strength as the second largest economy in the world, and the final victory of the "poverty alleviation" campaign by Chinese people, and hope to completely understand the development of China since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 from a diachronic perspective.

On the other hand, the locals, especially young people, regard learning Chinese and spreading Chinese culture as an important way and choice for career planning. In French Polynesia, the aspiration to build a community with a shared future for mankind is deeply rooted in the hearts of the people, and local young students are also aware of the potential that learning Chinese language and culture can bring to their employment and career development. When asked about their future career aspirations, many young students expressed their career aspirations related to China and Chinese culture: Student M had been to Wenling City, Zhejiang Province in China for exchange, leaving a very good impression on China, and she is looking forward to studying in China again after the epidemic, and visiting Beijing, Hangzhou and other historical and cultural cities. Student L has a special love for ancient Chinese songs. He hopes to come to China in the future, get the guidance of professional teachers, and even have the ambition to engage in the promotion of Chinese opera, ancient songs and "Hanfu" (traditional Chinese costumes). Besides, many students excitedly expressed the hope that through learning Chinese, they can become diplomats, Chinese teachers, panda keepers, etc.

So, it can be seen that the French Polynesian people have a new enthusiasm for the Chinese language and

Chinese culture, which provides a good condition for the Confucius Institute of UPF to carry out the new task of Chinese cultural communication in the new era. Based on this, the Chinese team of the Confucius Institute, based on the new tasks and requirements of Chinese cultural communication, has carried out a targeted exploration of new paths, which will be introduced in detail below.

### 3. EXPLORATION OF NEW PATH FOR CHINESE CULTURE COMMUNICATION AT CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE OF UPF

Combined with the three new tasks that Confucius Institutes are facing in spreading Chinese culture mentioned above, the author will summarize the new path of Chinese culture communication in the Confucius Institute of UPF by combining the targeted practical attempts and experiences of this Confucius Institute respectively.

#### 3.1 Integration of relevant content of contemporary Chinese national conditions into cultural communication to enrich the perspective of cultural communication

The conventional perspective of cultural communication in Confucius Institutes is often limited to traditional Chinese culture and Chinese talents. Based on the actual situation that the Confucius Institute students take the initiative to learn and understand the development process and experience of contemporary China, the Chinese team of the Confucius Institute of UPF, based on the contemporary Chinese national conditions, disseminates the Chinese model and Chinese experience to the world using the curriculum as the carrier, to promote the building of a community of shared future for mankind with “people-to-people ties”. Specifically, the team of the Confucius Institute implements communication-related to contemporary China’s national conditions from two aspects:

The first is to explore the double representation of the important theme of Chinese culture: history and modernity. Chinese traditional culture and contemporary Chinese society are two important themes in Chinese culture, which are not separated from, but complement each other. Therefore, the two need to achieve unity in the process of cultural teaching. It is obviously undesirable to abandon the content of traditional Chinese culture in order to absorb the content of contemporary Chinese national conditions. Given this, the teaching team of the Confucius Institute of UPF strives to find cultural elements that can reflect both traditional culture and contemporary China and to present the dual characteristics of the history and modernity of Chinese civilization with diverse cultural themes. Cultural course teachers independently arranged a variety of teaching topics including diet, education, clothing, science and technology, foreign exchanges, philosophy, etc. Under each topic, they sought entry

points and skillfully combined traditional cultural content with contemporary Chinese national conditions (Table 1). For example, in the topic of Chinese Diet, the teacher takes Chinese tea culture as the starting point and connects the ancient tea culture reflected by Lu Yu, the “sage of tea”, and *the Book of Songs* with the lyrics of popular songs, realizing the collision of ancient and modern Chinese culture. This combination of ancient and modern cultural teaching has narrowed the distance between the content of Chinese culture and the students, made them understand the successive development process of Chinese culture and its vitality in modern times, helped the Confucius Institute students establish a more systematic view of Chinese culture, and presented the long history of Chinese culture from a diachronic perspective. It also provides a better prerequisite for the completion of the task of telling a good Chinese story.

**Table 1**  
**The theme and specific content of “connecting ancient and modern” Chinese culture teaching**

<p>Course on Chinese Diet:  <i>Traditional culture in tea and wine</i></p>	<p>With the lyrics “The tea made by Lu Yu is like a splashy landscape painting” in Jay Chou’s song <i>Tea Made by Grandpa</i>, to introduce the Tang Dynasty tea scholar, “the saga of tea” Lu Yu and his <i>Tea Classic</i>, and then describes the spiritual connotation of “harmony in diversity” and “beauty and sharing” in tea ceremony culture.                  Introduces <i>the Wine Country</i> by Mo Yan, winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, to describe the Chinese wine culture, and tells the great inspiration significance of “wine” to literati and writers through the poetic genius Li Bai’s love for wine, and takes Huai Su, a calligrapher, as an example to prove it. Finally, to study and appreciate Huai Su’s <i>Self-Narrative Post</i> together.</p>
<p>Course on Education:  <i>Cultural Exchanges between China and France from the Perspective of Modern Chinese Educational History</i></p>	<p>Taking the “May Fourth Movement” as the introduction, to describe the popular “French fever” after 1919 - the work-study movement of Chinese students in France, focusing on the contribution made by the Sino-French University of Lyon in promoting the cultural and literary exchanges between China and France, with its alumni Jing Yinyu (translator of Lu Xun’s works) and Li Zhihua (translator of <i>A Dream of Red Mansions</i>) as examples.                  Taking the deeds of Zhou Enlai, Chen Yi, Deng Xiaoping and other figures as example to lead to the three struggles carried out by the Chinese work-study students in France represented by them (the February 28th Movement; the struggle to refuse payment; and the entry into Sino-French University in Lyon). To describe the three struggles in terms of their contribution to the promotion of China Revolution and promote the development of the Communist Party of China.</p>

The second is to closely combine the latest international Chinese education textbooks such as *Understanding Contemporary China* to enrich cultural communication resources related to national conditions. In August 2022, the multilingual textbook *Understanding Contemporary China* was officially published, including a series of textbooks for international Chinese education, which is of great significance to guide students to

know China and view the world, and to enhance the international vision of international Chinese learners. It is an inevitable choice to build a foreign discourse system with Chinese characteristics and to serve the communication and integration between China and foreign countries. Once this set of textbooks was released, the teaching team of the Confucius Institute of UPF actively paid attention to the activities related to the textbooks. Especially, at the end of October 2022, the volunteers from the Confucius Institute, under the guidance of teachers, formed a team to participate in the 2022 “Chinese Teaching Heroes” activities in North China. The team listened to the interpretation and specific use guidance of the textbook *Understanding Contemporary China* by international Chinese education experts. The study of this textbook made the team clearer about how to use the latest textbooks reflecting the new requirements and trends of international Chinese education in the new era to help the Confucius Institute students further consolidate their basic Chinese skills and improve their Chinese communication skills, while feeling the great achievements of China’s development and understanding the Chinese propositions, Chinese wisdom and Chinese solutions behind it.

### 3.2 Reform of the cultural teaching model of Confucius Institutes to promote the effect of cultural communication with more diversified goals

In order to achieve the task of ability cultivation for international Chinese education, it is necessary to explore a new cultural teaching model. Based on this, the author and the Chinese team of the Confucius Institute jointly established the international Chinese teaching concept with “action” as the core. Through a series of “action (task) chains” from shallow to deep, from local to comprehensive, and from knowledge mastery to ability cultivation, it can ensure that Chinese learners can “learn in action,” “learn in reflection” and “learn in cooperation”, and using “script” to promote and guide the development of “action”, forming the “script-action” teaching model to promote the implementation of cultural teaching multiple goals (Wang *et al.*, 2022).

According to the new requirements of international Chinese education and cultural teaching analyzed above, the central position of Chinese learners should be fully highlighted, their initiative and creativity should be fully brought into play, and their ability to complete tasks and achieve communication in the target language should be cultivated. In other words, learners’ “learning” is the core process of teaching and the key to ability training. Therefore, in the practice of “script-action” teaching mode, attention should be paid to changing the roles of teachers and students in the traditional international Chinese education classroom. Change students’ passive acceptance into active learning and autonomous action. Teachers, instead of instilling traditional knowledge,

should change to guiding students’ actions and providing students with assistance in solving problems. The identity of teachers is transformed into the paver of action and the assistant of learners. In short, it is to realize the characteristic teaching of students “active learning and applying”, teachers “act as a go-between” and both “mutual teaching and learning” (Wang, 2019).

In the Chinese culture course of the Confucius Institute of CFAU-UPF, based on the “script-action” teaching mode, the Chinese team formed a teaching design idea based on “script”, in the form of “chain” and with the goal of “ability cultivation”. The teachers independently arranged a variety of cultural themes: diet, clothing, education, science and technology, foreign exchange, philosophy, etc. We took the course on Chinese Diet as an example to present the teaching design:

First of all, according to the curriculum and teaching theme, teachers need to confirm the teaching “script” (Table 2).

**Table 2**  
**Design of “action script” for the theme teaching on Chinese Food of Chinese Culture course**

Language proficiency level of learners	Intermediate 6 / Advanced 7
Teaching objective	Acquire: Chinese language knowledge about Chinese food, table manners, etc. Use: Restaurant communication in Chinese (ordering, talking about food, etc.) Assimilate: Contact and adaptation of different diet culture
Ability cultivation	Interpersonal skills: Learning the dining etiquette, and the ability to communicate with the restaurant server Academic skills: Writing critical articles related to food and beverage in Chinese Ability to deal with social affairs: Reading menus, ordering food, writing reviews, etc.
Action (task) form	Initial action (task 1: mainly oral) Practical action (task 2: oral, task 3: written) Real communicative action (task 4: oral plus written)
Action (task) program	Through tasks 1 to 3, learners can master the language knowledge necessary for action, know what aspects should be paid attention to in restaurant evaluation, and complete the training task of real communication ability in Task 4, to write a multimodal catering comprehensive evaluation (cuisine, service, cost performance, etc.) of a Chinese restaurant according to the APP Dianping.
Assistance provided by teachers	Task 1: classification and teaching of vocabulary knowledge Task 2 and Task 3: Provide students with materials related to three dishes, check short essays by students Tasks 4: assisting in the process of plan formulation, corrections and suggestions of preliminary results, and finally helping learners to output the final results
Assessment methods	Combination of teacher rating and students’ mutual evaluation

Based on the above teaching “script”, large-scale teaching activities can be effectively carried out and guided, and more comprehensive teaching actions can be arranged. The teaching team adopts the “action (task) chain” to achieve the training goal of verbal communication ability through a series of actions, which are divided into three links: initial action, practical action and real communication action. The following will elaborate on four tasks of the three links in detail combined with the course on Chinese diet.

★ The initial action is “preparatory action”, which focuses on the teacher’s explanation and the learner’s acquisition of relevant knowledge. Task 1 of the course *Chinese diet* focuses on explaining Chinese catering culture, vocabulary and sentence patterns for cooking and ordering, and other language knowledge, to help learners get ready for follow-up tasks.

★ Practical action refers to the learner’s practice of completing some oral or written tasks based on the knowledge accumulated in the initial action. This part takes learners as the center to complete relevant practical tasks independently, while teachers only serve as assistants to provide help for them. In this course, practical action is divided into two specific tasks:

☆ Task 2: the oral task. The teacher first uses introduction articles and videos of “Mapo Tofu”, “Zhajiangmian (noodles with soybean paste)” and “Xiaolongbao (steamed small dumplings)” in Chinese as clues, and asks learners to collect information on their own to introduce a Chinese dish. The introduction content is not limited, the development history of the dish, food customs, preparation methods, etc. can be included.

☆ Task 3: the written task. Learners are required to write short essays on the topic of *My view of gourmet* to explain their views on food, such as the importance of food (such as color, fragrance, etc.) and food-related elements (such as restaurant environment, price, whether it is “Internet celebrity”, etc.), so as to pave the way for the completion of the final real communication action.

★ Real communication actions are directly linked to the communicative tasks and goals in the real context, and a comprehensive application of the knowledge reserves and practical achievements of the first two links, which is not only the final product of “script-action” teaching but also the concentrated embodiment of the teaching goal of cultivating authentic communication competence. In the course on Chinese diet, the final real communication action (Task 4) focuses on writing or shooting a multimodal comprehensive assessment of a Chinese restaurant, enabling learners to comprehensively use the vocabulary, sentence patterns and expressions they have learned in the context of “writing reviews”, at the same time exercising additional abilities such as using computers, typesetting and beautifying, and video editing, to practice

both language ability and extension ability and to lay the foundation for the future real communication that students may face.

### 3.3 Innovation in cultural communication forms and building digital cultural teaching and communication resources

Traditional cultural teaching and cultural communication activities are often limited to offline face-to-face teaching in the classroom or on-site experience, which was also the case in the Confucius Institute of UPF. However, since the outbreak of COVID-19, the offline teaching mode has been greatly affected and restricted, and many teaching tasks and even cultural promotion activities of Confucius Institutes have been forced to shift to online. As mentioned above, the current construction of digital teaching resources in the field of international Chinese education is relatively limited, which makes the available digital resources extremely limited when actually carrying out cultural teaching and communication activities. In short supply, the transmission effect is also greatly reduced. Therefore, it is necessary for all parties to participate and invest together to accelerate the construction of various types of digital resources such as cultural teaching and communication. In this process, the Center for Language Education and Cooperation of the Ministry of Education has played a good leading role. In the years 2021 and 2022, in order to implement the newly promulgated *The Standard for Chinese Proficiency in International Chinese Language Education (Standard)* and enrich the innovation of international Chinese education and teaching resources in terms of form and content, the Center has set up a special teaching resource innovation project to encourage the development and promotion of innovative teaching resources for international Chinese education.

The Confucius Institute of CFAU-UPF also actively responds to the needs of cultural education and communication in the field of international Chinese education. It applied for the teaching resources construction project in 2022, and successfully launched the general project of *Construction of Teaching Resources and Micro-Lessons on “Chinese Culture and National Conditions” for Native French Speakers*. This teaching resource focuses on the practical problems that need to be solved urgently, such as insufficient cultural teaching and communication resources, insufficient digital teaching resources, and unbalanced language distribution of resources. The main construction content of this resource is electronic courseware and supporting video micro-lessons, in which the traditional Chinese culture and contemporary Chinese national conditions are closely integrated. The resource aims to show a more three-dimensional and real image of China in the way of “connecting ancient and modern” to provide a resource guarantee for enriching the perspective of cultural communication. At present, the project team is focusing

on the design and production of teaching resources, looking forward to completing the project construction work as soon as possible and providing help for the digital transformation and upgrading of the Chinese culture communication work of the Confucius Institute.

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## CONCLUSION

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In view of the new tasks faced by Confucius Institutes in China's cultural communication in the new era, we take the exploration and experience of the Confucius Institute of UPF on new paths of cultural education and communication as a cue, from the perspectives of cultural communication, cultural teaching model innovation and digital transformation of cultural communication resources, etc., discussing how to fulfil the important task of spreading Chinese culture and telling Chinese stories in the new era based on the practice of the Confucius Institute. It is hoped that the exploration and attempt of the Confucius Institute can inspire and provide reference for more institutions to carry out a wider range of Chinese cultural communication work, and jointly complete the important task and glorious mission of telling China's stories well.

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