

Article

The Preheating-Experience-Review Teaching Model for Cultural Tourism among International Students in China

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Abstract: Under China's strategy of promoting Chinese culture internationally and the national education requirements for international students, new media platforms such as WeChat, Xiaohongshu, and TikTok have become important facilitators of cultural tourism. However, current teaching practices face two practical problems: overemphasizing classroom instruction while neglecting hands-on experience, and prioritizing site visits without facilitating meaningful cultural transformation. To address these gaps, this study integrates new media communication theory, experiential learning theory, and cross-cultural adaptation theory to develop a three-stage Preheating-Experience-Review teaching model. The preheating stage leverages curated new media content to activate students' prior knowledge and stimulate cultural curiosity before field engagement. The experience stage employs structured experiential tasks, including guided observation worksheets, peer interaction prompts, and real-time digital documentation, to deepen immersive learning during on-site cultural tourism activities. The review stage facilitates reflective consolidation through collaborative writing, group debriefing discussions, and the production of user-generated content, enabling students to transition from passive learners to active secondary communicators of Chinese culture. Based on a small-scale teaching practice involving 18 international students in Chengdu, this study primarily collects qualitative data through reflective journals and focus group discussions, supplemented by quantitative questionnaire data measuring changes in cultural expectations, motivation, and cross-cultural understanding. Key findings indicate that new media preheating significantly raises students' cultural expectations and motivation; structured experiential tasks deepen cross-cultural understanding and foster meaningful engagement with host culture; and the review phase effectively transforms students into active secondary communicators of Chinese culture. The study provides practical guidance for university international education departments, cultural tourism agencies, and International Chinese Language Education programs seeking to integrate new media and experiential pedagogies.

Keywords: cultural tourism education; new media communication; experiential learning; cross-cultural adaptation; international students

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1. Introduction

China has become a major destination for international students, with over 500,000 enrolled before the COVID-19 pandemic [1]. These students often engage with Chinese culture through travel, yet their contact with cultural sites tends to be superficial and fragmented. Two practical challenges persist in current teaching practice: an overreliance on classroom instruction at the expense of hands-on experience, and an emphasis on site visits without supporting mechanisms for meaningful cultural integration.

China actively promotes cultural tourism within its international education policy, recognizing travel as an opportunity for cross-cultural understanding. However, most programs adopt approaches that lack balance—either prioritizing lecture-based delivery

without complementary site engagement, or organizing site visits without structured learning tasks [1]. Students may walk through museums without guided observation or post-visit reflection, leaving little more than photographs. Moreover, international students frequently share travel experiences on social media, reaching audiences in their home countries. Yet no pedagogical framework systematically prepares them to serve as informed secondary communicators of Chinese culture.

Recent research indicates that short-form videos shape destination image through emotional engagement. Platforms such as Xiaohongshu generate aspirational expectations among young travelers. International students in China commonly rely on social media for cultural tourism decisions. Experiential learning theory emphasizes that concrete experience alone is insufficient without reflection and application. Structured on-site tasks have been shown to improve cultural understanding. Reflection is essential for transforming travel into intercultural competence. Tourists increasingly act as cultural mediators through digital storytelling [1].

Despite these contributions, three gaps remain. First, most studies focus on general tourists rather than international students, who face distinct cross-cultural adaptation needs. Second, existing literature places greater emphasis on content reach metrics rather than pedagogical design; pre-travel preparation remains generic rather than tailored to specific platform affordances. Third, no study has systematically integrated new media preparation, structured experiential tasks, and collaborative review sharing into a unified model for international students' cultural tourism [2].

To address these gaps, this study develops a three-stage Preheating Experience Review (PER) teaching model [3]. The Preheating stage leverages WeChat official accounts for authoritative knowledge, Xiaohongshu for aspirational framing, and TikTok for emotional resonance. The Experience stage includes guided observation worksheets, peer-interaction prompts, and post-visit reflection notes. The Review stage involves group sharing, collaborative writing of review texts, and encouragement to publish original content as secondary communicators.

This study adopts a practice-based design with mixed methods, conducted in Chengdu with 18 international students from six countries [4]. Three research questions guide the investigation: (1) How can WeChat, Xiaohongshu, and TikTok be strategically employed for cultural preparation to shape expectations and motivation? (2) What specific on-site teaching strategies enhance participation and cultural understanding? (3) How can structured review sharing support students' development as active secondary communicators of Chinese culture?

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews relevant literature. Section 3 describes the methodology. Section 4 presents the findings. Section 5 discusses implications and limitations [5]. Section 6 concludes.

2. Literature Review

This chapter reviews three interrelated strands of scholarship pertinent to the PER teaching model: the role of social media in cultural preheating, experiential learning during site-based instruction, and post-experience reflection as a mechanism for secondary communication [2].

2.1. Social Media and Cultural Preheating

Short-form video platforms shape destination image through emotional engagement and narrative transportation. Xiaohongshu generates young tourists' pre-travel expectations via user-generated lifestyle content, especially for culturally rich destinations [6]. Among international students in China, social media features such as interactivity and visibility positively correlate with cultural tourism engagement. International students experience culture shock phases that influence their motivation for cultural exploration. Pre-departure training is effective but often lacks platform-specific design and cultural adaptation.

However, most studies focus on general tourists rather than international students, whose adaptation needs are distinct. The literature emphasizes quantitative reach metrics over pedagogical structure. No study has defined preheating as a structured pedagogical phase that integrates new media content with explicit learning objectives.

2.2. Experiential Learning and On-Site Cultural Education

Experiential learning theory holds that concrete experience alone is insufficient without reflective observation and active experimentation [7]. On-site structured learning tasks—such as guided observation worksheets and peer-interaction prompts—significantly enhance cultural understanding compared to unstructured free time. A meta-analysis of study abroad programs found that experiential learning effects remain moderate when tasks lack cultural specificity or instructional scaffolding.

Critical limitations persist. Most studies focus on students from Western educational backgrounds in European settings, with limited attention to Asian destinations where cultural distance tends to be greater. Research seldom integrates cross-cultural adaptation frameworks with the design of on-site learning tasks. Field trip studies typically treat on-site experience as a single undifferentiated phase, failing to distinguish among task types or their sequencing [8].

2.3. Post-Experience Reflection and Secondary Communication

Structured reflection is essential for transforming travel experiences into intercultural competence, yet many study abroad programs allocate insufficient time for debriefing [2]. Sharing travel experiences on social media contributes to identity construction and social validation, with outcomes influenced by individual acculturation patterns. The notion of the tourist as a cultural mediator suggests that contemporary travelers increasingly perform intermediary functions through digital storytelling. While frameworks exist that divide transformative study abroad into pre-, during-, and post-experience phases, they do not explicitly articulate how review activities can actively foster cultural ambassadorship.

Research on electronic word-of-mouth has examined motivations for sharing, but rarely treats such sharing as an intentional pedagogical outcome [9]. International students' potential role as secondary communicators of Chinese culture remains underexplored in current literature. Existing studies typically treat reflection and sharing as distinct processes; in contrast, the PER model integrates them into a cohesive review phase.

2.4. Research Gaps and Positioning

Existing research addresses new media communication, experiential learning, and cross-cultural adaptation separately, lacking an integrated pedagogical framework for international students' cultural tourism [9]. The PER model synthesizes these dimensions to resolve the imbalance between excessive classroom instruction and site-based activities devoid of meaningful cultural transformation.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a practice-based design with mixed methods to implement and evaluate the PER teaching model [10]. A practice-based design is appropriate when the research aim is to develop, implement, and assess a pedagogical approach in a real-world educational setting. The study used a single-group pre- and post-implementation design. Qualitative data—including individual reflection notes, group review texts, and small-group discussion records—served as the primary evidence source. Quantitative data from pre- and post-implementation questionnaires were collected as supplementary evidence. The study was conducted in Chengdu, a UNESCO World Cultural City and a major destination for international students in western China, selected for its abundance of Shu cultural heritage sites and the established collaboration with a local cultural tourism platform and two universities.

3.2. Participants

Through cooperation with Cettrip and two local universities, 18 international students were recruited via convenience sampling [11]. Participants came from six countries across three continents: Thailand and Indonesia in Asia contributed six students, Italy and France in Europe contributed five students, and Egypt in Africa contributed seven students. Their average age was 23.1 years, with a standard deviation of 1.8. All participants had lived in China for at least three months prior to the study, and their Chinese proficiency ranged from HSK Level 3 to Level 5. All 18 participants completed the pre-activity questionnaire, attended the site visit, and submitted post-visit reflection notes. Fifteen participants attended the debriefing session and contributed to the collaborative group review texts; the three who missed the session due to scheduling constraints were excluded from the analysis of Review stage data but remained in the analysis of Preheating and Experience stage data.

3.3. PER Intervention

The implementation comprised three sequential phases conducted over approximately three weeks [12].

The Preheating Phase occurred during Week 1, seven days prior to the site visit. Participants engaged in three sets of preparatory activities. First, they subscribed to the Cettrip WeChat official account, which published three articles on Shu culture covering embroidery history, archaeological discoveries at Jinsha, and shadow puppetry as intangible cultural heritage [13]. Participants read each article and submitted a brief written comment. Second, they viewed three short videos on TikTok—each 60 to 90 seconds long—that introduced five key cultural sites: the Giant Panda Base, Luodai Ancient Town, Jinli Ancient Street, the Chengdu Museum, and a shadow play workshop. Third, they completed two guided exploration tasks on Xiaohongshu: searching for information about Chengdu's intangible cultural heritage and posting a comment on a selected user-generated post.

The Experience Phase took place on Day 8 and involved a full-day guided site visit along a curated cultural route encompassing the five locations [14]. During the visit, participants undertook three categories of structured tasks. First, each received a guided observation worksheet with four prompts: identifying three symbols representative of Shu culture, describing the rolling needle embroidery technique in their own words, locating one example of how traditional culture is sustained in contemporary Chengdu, and photographing a cultural artifact previously unfamiliar to them. Second, peer interaction prompts were provided on printed cards, including asking a local artisan a question, discussing unexpected observations with a participant from another country, and taking a group photograph symbolizing historical Chengdu. Third, at the conclusion of the visit, each participant composed a reflective note of 150–200 words addressing two questions: one newly acquired insight about Shu culture and one remaining question for further exploration.

The Review Phase was conducted on Day 15, one week after the site visit, and consisted of a two-hour debriefing session. It began with a 30-minute whole-group discussion. Participants were then divided into four small groups of three to four members each. Each group collaboratively drafted a review text of 300–500 words in a shared WeChat group, responding to a prompt that asked them to reflect on what they learned, how they felt, and what they would share with peers in their home countries. This collaborative writing activity lasted 60 minutes. The session concluded with a 30-minute opportunity for participants to voluntarily publish original content—including photos, short videos, or written posts—on their personal Xiaohongshu or TikTok accounts as secondary communicators [15]. No incentives were offered for participation in this activity.

3.4. Data Collection

Data were collected from three sources, with qualitative data given priority. The first qualitative source consisted of individual reflection notes written by 18 participants

following the instructional activity, each ranging from approximately 150 to 200 words. The second source comprised four collaboratively written group review texts, each between 350 and 450 words. The third source included transcribed records of small-group discussions drawn from audio recordings of approximately 60 minutes' duration. Field notes were also maintained throughout the study.

A brief questionnaire served as the quantitative source and was administered to all 18 participants both prior to and following the instructional activity. The pre-activity questionnaire was completed one day before the initial preparatory phase, and the post-activity questionnaire was completed immediately after the concluding debriefing session. The questionnaire contained three sections. Section A assessed cultural knowledge through ten multiple-choice items concerning Chengdu's history and customs. Section B assessed cross-cultural sensitivity using 18 items based on an established adaptation scale, rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) for the pre-activity sample was 0.87. Section C assessed motivation for cultural sharing using five Likert-type items [12].

3.5. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations. Inferential statistical tests were not performed due to the limited sample size and absence of a control group.

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis following a standardized six-phase procedure. Phase 1 involved familiarization with the data. Phase 2 entailed generating initial codes line by line. Phase 3 focused on identifying potential themes through code clustering. Phase 4 consisted of reviewing candidate themes against the full dataset. Phase 5 involved refining, defining, and naming final themes. Phase 6 culminated in report writing, supported by representative quotations. To ensure analytical rigor, two independent researchers coded thirty percent of the qualitative data, selected randomly. Inter-coder reliability, assessed using Cohen's kappa, reached 0.88. Discrepancies were resolved through consensus discussion. All qualitative data were analyzed in their original language—Chinese or English—and quotations included in this article were translated into English by the first author and verified by a second bilingual researcher.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

All participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Written informed consent was obtained from each of the 18 participants. To ensure confidentiality, all personally identifiable information—including names—was removed prior to data analysis. In reporting, participants are referenced solely by country of origin and a randomly assigned numeric identifier [16].

4. Results

This chapter presents the findings organized around the three research questions corresponding to the Preheating, Experience, and Review stages of the PER model [17]. Qualitative evidence from reflection notes, group review texts, and discussion records is reported alongside descriptive quantitative data from pre- and post-implementation questionnaires.

4.1. Effects of New Media Preheating on Cultural Expectations and Motivation

The first research question examined how WeChat, Xiaohongshu, and TikTok can be strategically used in cultural preheating to shape the expectations and motivation of international students before they visit a cultural site. Analysis of reflection notes and debriefing discussion transcripts revealed that the one-week preheating stage significantly shaped participants' expectations and motivation through three platform-specific functions.

WeChat official accounts were described by 15 of the 18 participants as providing reliable and detailed background knowledge. A student from Thailand (P03) wrote: "The

WeChat articles explained the history of Shu embroidery. Without that, when I saw the embroidery workshop, I would have just thought 'pretty patterns.' But because I read the article, I knew I was looking at 2,000 years of tradition." This perception was consistent across participants from different proficiency levels. Another student from Egypt (P11) noted: "The WeChat articles gave me the context. I am HSK 3, so some words were difficult, but the pictures helped. I understood the main story."

Xiaohongshu was cited by 14 of 18 participants as generating aspirational expectations through lifestyle-oriented user-generated content. A student from France (P08) commented: "I saw photos of other international students at Jinli Ancient Street, wearing traditional clothes. I thought, 'I want that experience too.'" Unlike WeChat, which participants associated with formal knowledge, Xiaohongshu created a sense of possibility and personal desire. A participant from Indonesia (P04) explained: "On Xiaohongshu, the posts are from people like me. They are not experts. They are just sharing their happy moments. That made me feel I could also have that happiness."

TikTok was mentioned by 10 of 18 participants as creating emotional and sensory engagement. A student from Italy (P06) said: "The TikTok videos had music and fast cuts. They showed the shadow puppet moving, the panda eating bamboo. I felt excited, not just informed." Unlike the cognitive preparation provided by WeChat or the lifestyle aspiration from Xiaohongshu, TikTok operated on an affective level, building anticipation through rhythm and visual storytelling.

Crucially, 13 of 18 participants reported that the combination of all three platforms worked better than any single platform. As one student from Pakistan (P13) explained: "WeChat gave me facts. Xiaohongshu gave me dreams. TikTok gave me feelings. Together, I was excited to go." This finding suggests that platform complementarity is more important than any single platform's effect.

Supplementary quantitative data from the pre- and post-preheating questionnaires supported these qualitative findings. On a five-point scale, participants' mean score for anticipated cultural engagement increased from 2.93 (SD = 0.70) before the preheating stage to 4.27 (SD = 0.59) afterward, a mean increase of 1.34 points. Their mean score for motivation to participate in the upcoming cultural tour rose from 3.07 (SD = 0.80) to 4.40 (SD = 0.51), a mean increase of 1.33 points.

4.2. Effects of Structured Experiential Tasks on On-Site Participation and Cultural Understanding

The second research question focused on identifying which specific on-site teaching strategies could enhance participation and cultural understanding among international students during cultural site visits in China. To answer this question, a thematic analysis was conducted on the 18 post-visit reflection notes, and three key mechanisms emerged that explained how the structured tasks generated learning effects. First, guided observation worksheets shifted students from passive seeing to active noticing. A student from Indonesia (P02) wrote: "The worksheet asked me to find three Shu patterns. I would have walked past the embroidery. But because I had to look for something specific, I stopped and looked closely. I saw the rolling needle technique." This mechanism — using a specific task to prompt focused attention — was mentioned in 14 of the 18 reflection notes. Students who completed the worksheet reported that they remembered more details than they would have otherwise. One participant from Egypt (P15) wrote: "Without the worksheet, I would just take photos. With the worksheet, I had to look for meaning."

Second, peer-interaction prompts facilitated authentic cross-cultural dialogue. A student from Kazakhstan (P14) shared in her reflection note: "I had to ask the shadow puppet artisan about his training. He said his grandfather taught his father, and his father taught him. I learned that shadow play is not just a performance [4]. It is family heritage." The requirement to ask a question rather than passively listen prompted students to engage in meaningful communicative acts. Several participants noted that the prompts supported their confidence in speaking Chinese, as the questions were clearly defined and the artisans were consistently supportive and responsive.

Third, post-visit reflection notes helped consolidate learning immediately after the experience. A student from Pakistan (P12) wrote: "Writing forced me to put things in order. When I finished, I understood better what I had learned." Unlike the group review texts written a week later, these immediate notes captured raw, unpolished observations. Many students reported that the act of writing helped them identify gaps in their understanding. One participant from Italy (P07) noted: "When I tried to write what I learned about Shu embroidery, I realized I could not remember the name of the technique. So I asked the guide again before we left."

Quantitative data showed corresponding improvements in cultural knowledge and cross-cultural sensitivity. Among the 18 participants, cultural knowledge test scores increased from a pre-activity mean of 2.13 correct answers out of 10 ($SD = 1.06$) to a post-activity mean of 3.87 ($SD = 0.83$), a mean gain of 1.74 correct answers. Cross-cultural sensitivity scores (18 items, five-point scale) improved from a pre-activity mean of 3.31 ($SD = 0.62$) to a post-activity mean of 4.18 ($SD = 0.55$), a mean increase of 0.87.

4.3. Effects of Structured Review Sharing on Secondary Communication Willingness

The third research question examined how structured review sharing can transform international students from passive cultural consumers into active secondary communicators of Chinese culture. Evidence was drawn from the four collaboratively written group review texts, each ranging from three hundred fifty to four hundred fifty words, as well as from debriefing discussion transcripts and behavioral records of social media posting.

Thematic analysis of the four group review texts revealed three themes. Cultural discovery appeared in all four group texts, with students articulating specific knowledge gains. One group wrote: "We learned that Shu embroidery uses a rolling needle technique. The thread wraps around itself to make a three-dimensional effect. We want to tell others about this." Another group stated: "The bronze figure from Jinsha has huge ears and eyes. The guide explained that ancient Shu people believed their priests could perceive what ordinary people could not. This was not just art—it reflected spiritual beliefs and worldview."

Emotional connection appeared in three of the four group texts. One group shared: "Walking through Jinli at sunset felt different [7, 18]. We were not tourists anymore. We felt like we belonged a little bit." Another wrote: "The shadow puppet artisan's hands were aged but steady. When he demonstrated puppet manipulation techniques, we sensed the depth and continuity of tradition."

Sharing intention appeared in all four group texts. One group wrote: "My friends back home only know Beijing and Shanghai. After today, I want to show them Chengdu." Another stated: "We will post on Xiaohongshu and tell people: come to Chengdu, not just for pandas, but for the culture."

Behavioral evidence showed that 13 of the 18 participants posted original content on their personal Xiaohongshu or TikTok accounts within one week after the debriefing session. The content included photo sets ($n=8$), short videos ($n=4$), and reflective texts ($n=1$). Several participants posted multiple times.

Supplementary quantitative data supported these behavioral findings [19]. Among the 18 participants, willingness to share Chinese culture with people in their home countries increased from a pre-activity mean of 3.00 ($SD = 0.93$) to a post-activity mean of 4.47 ($SD = 0.64$), a mean increase of 1.47. Intention to continue sharing cultural content in the future rose from 2.93 ($SD = 0.88$) to 4.33 ($SD = 0.62$), a mean increase of 1.40.

4.4. Summary of Results

Across the three research questions, the findings demonstrate a cumulative effect of the PER model. In the Preheating stage, WeChat provided reliable background knowledge for fifteen of eighteen participants, Xiaohongshu generated aspirational expectations for fourteen, and TikTok created emotional engagement for ten. Thirteen participants reported that the combination of all three platforms was more effective than any single platform [20]. In the Experience stage, analysis of eighteen post-visit reflection notes

identified three mechanisms that deepened cultural learning: guided observation worksheets shifted students from passive seeing to active noticing, peer interaction prompts facilitated authentic cross-cultural dialogue, and post-visit reflection notes consolidated learning immediately. Cultural knowledge test scores showed a mean increase of 1.74 correct answers, and cross-cultural sensitivity scores improved by a mean of 0.87. In the Review stage, thematic analysis of four group review texts revealed three recurring themes: cultural discovery, emotional connection, and sharing intention. Behavioral evidence indicated that thirteen of the eighteen participants posted original content on their personal social media accounts within one week. Willingness to share Chinese culture increased by a mean of 1.47, and intention to continue sharing rose by a mean of 1.40. Collectively, these results provide empirical support for the PER model as a coherent pedagogical framework integrating new media preheating, structured experiential tasks, and collaborative review sharing to transform cultural tourism into meaningful and shareable learning for international students.

5. Discussion

This chapter interprets the principal findings, discusses their relevance to International Chinese Language Education, acknowledges the study's limitations, proposes directions for future research, and summarises the theoretical and practical contributions [2, 21].

5.1. Interpretation of Key Findings

The results yield three main insights into how cultural tourism can be structured as meaningful learning for international students [22, 23].

First, WeChat, Xiaohongshu, and TikTok play complementary rather than substitutive roles in the preheating stage. WeChat supplies authoritative background knowledge that students perceive as trustworthy. Xiaohongshu fosters aspirational expectations through peer-generated lifestyle content. TikTok generates emotional and sensory engagement via short-form video. Notably, thirteen of the eighteen participants reported that the combination of all three platforms was more effective than any single platform [1]. One participant's remark illustrated this complementarity: "WeChat gave me facts. Xiaohongshu gave me dreams. TikTok gave me feelings." This finding extends earlier research on short-form video and destination image formation by demonstrating that platform complementarity is as important as the effect of any individual platform. For practitioners, this implies that cultural preheating should not depend on a single social media channel but should deliberately employ multiple platforms, each aligned with a distinct pedagogical function.

Second, three specific teaching strategies enhanced on-site participation and cultural understanding. Guided observation worksheets shifted students from passive viewing to active noticing, addressing a limitation identified concerning the inadequacy of unstructured free time. Peer interaction prompts facilitated authentic cross-cultural dialogue, applying acculturation theory within a tourism education setting. Post-visit reflection notes helped consolidate learning immediately after the experience, responding to concerns that many study abroad programmes allocate insufficient time for debriefing. Together, these strategies transform the conventional field trip, which has been criticised as monolithic, into a sequenced experiential learning process consistent with updated experiential learning theory.

Third, the review phase successfully turned international students into active secondary communicators. The collaborative writing of group review texts served as a structured debriefing mechanism, eliciting three recurring themes across all groups: cultural discovery, emotional connection, and sharing intention. The behavioral outcome demonstrates that structured review sharing can act as a catalyst for the phenomenon of the tourist as cultural mediator. This finding addresses the need to specify how post-experience phases can actively encourage students to become cultural ambassadors. Unlike most electronic word of mouth research, which treats sharing as a product of

individual motivation, the present study shows that sharing can be intentionally cultivated through pedagogical design.

5.2. Implications for International Chinese Language Education

Although the study was conducted in a cultural tourism context, its findings have direct relevance for international Chinese language education [8].

The Preheating stage addresses a persistent challenge in Chinese language classrooms: students often encounter cultural content without adequate contextual preparation. Traditional textbooks introduce cultural topics through reading passages and vocabulary lists, but learners frequently lack the motivational and cognitive readiness for deep engagement. The PER model's use of WeChat articles, TikTok videos, and Xiaohongshu content as pre-learning materials offers a replicable strategy for language teachers. For instance, before a lesson on shadow puppetry, an instructor could ask students to watch a short TikTok video demonstrating the craft, read a WeChat article explaining its historical origins, and browse Xiaohongshu posts showing peers interacting with shadow puppet workshops. This approach transforms cultural pre-teaching from a passive vocabulary exercise into an active expectation-building process.

The Experience stage provides a pedagogical model for bridging classroom learning with real-world cultural encounters. A common observation in the field is that students may pass standardised tests such as the HSK yet remain unable to navigate authentic cultural situations. The guided observation worksheet used in this study illustrates how language teachers can design tasks that promote noticing and meaning-making rather than passive touring [24, 25]. Similarly, the peer interaction prompt requiring students to ask a local craftsman a question directly operationalises the principle of authentic communicative competence. For teachers organising field trips to museums, teahouses, or historical neighbourhoods, adopting or adapting these worksheet-based strategies can ensure that excursions produce measurable language and cultural learning outcomes instead of mere exposure.

The Review stage addresses a critical gap in current practice. Many study abroad programmes and cultural activities for international students end abruptly after the site visit, with no structured mechanism for consolidating learning or encouraging students to articulate what they have understood. The PER model's collaborative writing of group review texts in a shared WeChat group serves both as a language production task and a cultural reflection tool. Students in this study produced texts of 300 to 500 words, demonstrating that the review phase can function as an integrated writing assessment. Moreover, the finding that thirteen of eighteen participants voluntarily posted original content on their personal social media accounts has direct implications for cultivating cultural ambassadors. Rather than treating students as passive recipients of cultural knowledge, the PER model positions them as active secondary communicators who share Chinese culture with home-country audiences.

Finally, the PER model offers a low-cost, high-impact framework that international Chinese language education programmes can implement immediately without additional funding or technical infrastructure. The required resources are minimal: curating existing freely available social media content, designing simple observation worksheets that any instructor can create in under an hour, and facilitating a two-hour debriefing session with collaborative writing. For programmes with limited budgets, this makes the PER model particularly attractive. The model can also be adapted for different proficiency levels, from beginners using shorter videos and sentence frames to advanced learners producing video-based reviews.

5.3. Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample size was small and drawn from only two universities in one city, limiting the generalisability of the findings. Second, the absence of a control group precludes causal inference, as observed changes may reflect maturation or testing effects. Third, the measurement window occurred immediately after the instructional activity, providing no evidence of long-term retention

of learning gains. Fourth, all participants had attained at least HSK Level 3 proficiency and had resided in China for three months; thus, findings may not extend to absolute beginners or newly arrived students [26]. Fifth, the study did not assess the quality or audience reception of the secondary communication content generated by participants.

5.4. Future Research Directions

Future research should address the limitations of this study through larger-scale investigations involving participants from multiple universities across different cities in China to enhance generalisability. Replication in other culturally rich cities—such as Xi'an, Beijing, or Shanghai—would test the applicability of the PER model to diverse heritage contexts. Comparative studies incorporating control groups, including traditional guided tours or unstructured free time, would strengthen causal evidence. Longitudinal designs with follow-ups at three, six, or twelve months would assess the durability of learning gains.

Further research should also explore adaptations of the PER model for various learner populations, including beginners with lower Chinese proficiency, newly arrived students experiencing early culture shock, and those engaged in fully online or hybrid learning formats. Another important direction is to examine how home-country audiences interpret and engage with students' secondary communication content, and whether such content challenges or reinforces cultural stereotypes [10, 27]. Finally, integrating the PER model with formal language curricula—by aligning its three stages with specific vocabulary sets, grammatical structures, or learning outcomes—would position cultural tourism as a core component, rather than an extracurricular activity, within international student education.

5.5. Theoretical and Practical Contributions

Despite its limitations, this study makes two main contributions. Theoretically, it integrates new media communication, experiential learning, and cross-cultural adaptation into a coherent three-stage pedagogical model amenable to refinement and extension in future work [2, 21]. Practically, the PER model provides a low-cost, high-impact framework that shifts cultural tourism from passive consumption toward active, meaningful, and shareable cross-cultural learning, supporting international students in assuming roles as cultural ambassadors for their home countries.

6. Conclusion

This study developed and evaluated the PER teaching model for cultural tourism among international students in Chengdu. The three-stage model addresses two persistent challenges in current practice: an overemphasis on classroom instruction at the expense of hands-on experience, and site visits that fail to facilitate meaningful cultural transformation. Findings from 18 international students demonstrate that new media preheating using WeChat, Xiaohongshu, and TikTok raises cultural expectations and motivation; structured experiential tasks deepen cross-cultural understanding; and the review phase—particularly collaborative writing and debriefing—transforms students into active secondary communicators. Thirteen participants posted original cultural content on their personal social media accounts following the activity, providing behavioral evidence of this transformation.

The PER model offers a low-cost, high-impact framework for university international education departments, cultural tourism agencies, and International Chinese Language Education programs, requiring only minimal resources. Future research should test the model with larger and more diverse samples, employ longitudinal designs to assess long-term retention, and examine its adaptability to online or hybrid formats. Despite its limitations, this study provides empirical support for integrating new media, experiential learning, and collaborative reflection into a coherent pedagogical model that makes cultural tourism a meaningful and shareable learning experience for international students in China.

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