Boundary Crossing: Integrating Visual Arts into Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

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Abstract This chapter reports on the author's effort to cross disciplinary boundaries in teaching Chinese as a foreign language (CFL). It presents a mixed-methods study that examines student perceptions about, as well as the benefits and the challenges of, integrating visual arts and online art museum visits into CFL teaching. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from a questionnaire and semistructured interviews. Based on the findings, the author discusses the benefits of using art-integration approaches in CFL teaching, particularly their potential in answering the Modern Language Association's call for curricular transformation in collegiate foreign language curriculum (MLA, *Foreign languages and higher education: New structures for a changed world*. Retrieved from http://www.mla.org/flreport, 2007). The author also analyzes the challenges encountered and proposes future research directions and suggestions for future integration of visual arts in the CFL curriculum.

Keywords Teaching Chinese as a foreign language · Teaching languages through art · Visual arts · Art-integration approach · CFL curriculum

1 Introduction

The Modern Language Association (MLA) of America issued a report that called for "a broad, intellectually driven approach to teaching language and culture in higher education" (MLA, 2007, p. 1) to produce "educated speakers who have deep translingual and transcultural competence" (MLA, 2007, p. 2). This call aimed to replace the two-tiered curriculum that separated language instruction from content, which had long been the dominant curricular template in collegiate modern

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languages departments throughout the second half of the twentieth century (Urlaub, 2014). To answer the call, foreign language faculty need to "cross disciplinary boundaries, incorporate the study of all kinds of material in addition to the strictly literary, and promote wide cultural understanding through research and teaching" (MLA, 2007, p. 2).

Visual art materials, such as drawing, painting, sculpture, and photography, are culturally loaded. Including such materials in the language curriculum can "transform a language class into a cross-disciplinary course which not only combines language, art, literature, and history, but also helps students take a major step toward reaching proficiency standards." (Ortuño, 1994, p. 500).

Previous studies have shown that integrating visual art or art museum visits into language curriculum (hereafter referred to as the art-integration approach) benefits both first language (L1) learning (e.g., Brouillette, 2012; Gambrell & Koskinen, 2002; Wilhelm, 2004) and second language (L2) or foreign language (FL) learning (Berhó & Defferding, 2005; Díaz, 2016; Knapp, 2012; Ortuño, 1994; Sederberg, 2013; Spina, 2006). For example, Ortuño (1994, p. 501) outlined the following eight benefits related to teaching Spanish as an L2 through visual art: (1) providing students with a social, historical, geographical, and religious context for using their language skills; (2) lowering students' learning anxiety; (3) broadening students' cognition at all ability levels; (4) creating a learner-centered learning environment; (5) improving students' analytical thinking skills; (6) increasing students' learning interest and active exploration of problems; (7) facilitating the transition from language acquisition to literature learning; and (8) motivating students to continue learning foreign language and culture because of the sense of accomplishment when they are capable of talking about art in a meaningful way.

Notwithstanding the various benefits, the art-integration approach has not been popular among Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) instructors. Few pedagogical reports or empirical studies have been published about applying this approach in the collegiate CFL curriculum. Moreover, although there are some publications on teaching Spanish (e.g., Berhó & Defferding, 2005; Díaz, 2016; Ortuño, 1994) and German (e.g., Knapp, 2012; Sederberg, 2013) with the art-integration approach in U.S. colleges, most of them are pedagogical reports that relied on students' informal feedback or the author's classroom observation as the only data source. Therefore, empirical studies are needed to reveal the benefits and challenges of implementing this art-integration approach into the post-secondary CFL curriculum.

To bridge the practice and research gaps, the researcher of this study experimented with the art-integration approach in a college-level CFL course, aiming to cross boundaries as discussed above in the MLA's calls for language course innovations. This study examines student perceptions about, as well as the benefits and the challenges of, integrating visual art and online art museum visits into CFL teaching and identifies areas that need improvement for future endeavors. Different from previous studies, this study adopted a mixed-methods research methodology. The findings of this study are expected to shed some light on the development of an interdisciplinary CFL curriculum and on crossing boundaries for innovation in language education.

2   Literature Review

Previous research has found that visual arts can motivate students' learning and increase class attendance (e.g., Baker et al., 2002; Brouillette, 2012; Catterall & Peppler, 2007), communication skills (e.g., Podiozny, 2000), critical thinking skills (e.g., Bowen et al., 2014) and creativity (e.g., Moga et al., 2000). Visual arts have also been found to be beneficial for first language development in K-12 contexts (e.g., Brouillette, 2012; Gambrell & Koskinen, 2002; Wilhelm, 2004).

The idea of teaching an L2 or FL through art is not new. Little research, however, has been published about the actual use of art in L2 acquisition (Berhó & Defferding, 2005). To date, only a handful reports have been published where this approach has been adopted to teach English (Spina, 2006), Spanish (Berhó & Defferding, 2005; Díaz, 2016; Ortuño, 1994), and German (e.g., Knapp, 2012; Sederberg, 2013) as an L2 or an FL.

Spina (2006) investigated whether an art-based ESL program would facilitate English language acquisition with a quasi-experiment. Two classes of 5th-grade Spanish-speaking students participated in this experiment. The treatment group attended two art-based classes every week, whereas the control group was taught with traditional ESL methods. Quantitative data (including students' scores in English and Spanish achievement tests and teacher questionnaires) and qualitative data (including observations, audio recordings, and teacher interviews) were collected and analyzed. Results showed that an art-based language curriculum facilitated ESL students' English learning without sacrificing their first language proficiencies.

In addition to ESL, the art-integration approach has been adopted in teaching Spanish as a foreign language. For example, Ortuño (1994) illustrated how to incorporate artworks into different levels of Spanish language courses, a cross-disciplinary course, and a study-abroad program for undergraduates. Based on her observation and teaching experience, Ortuño asserted that using paintings at any level of language instruction had various pedagogical benefits. To name a few, it allowed students to practice their oral and written skills in a "social, historical, geographical, or religious context" (p. 501). It engaged students and lowered their learning anxiety. It also created a learner-centered learning environment, developed students' analytical thinking skills, and motivated students for further language and culture study.

Berhó and Defferding (2005) reported on students' responses to art and art projects in college-level Spanish and French classes. Based on the authors' classroom observations, students enjoyed learning the target culture through art, especially those who were shy or at a lower proficiency level than the rest of the class. Moreover, students learned new vocabulary and were motivated to talk through creating an art project. Berhó and Defferding also demonstrated how to integrate art and student-created art projects into Spanish and French classes with detailed examples. They suggested that teachers should first activate students' background knowledge on the subject and then ask students to learn about the artwork and artists, or

even ask students to create their artwork and then describe it or discuss it orally or in writing.

Another publication that documented the art-integration approach in the Spanish curriculum is Díaz (2016). In this study, Díaz described how she incorporated art museum visits into a Spanish business course at a liberal arts college. Based on email communications with students, faculty, and the director of the campus gallery, the author concluded that supplementing the foreign language curriculum with the incorporation of art museum visits had benefits for all shareholders. Díaz also argued that integrating art museum visits into foreign language curriculums could offer educators the same benefits that service-learning can.

Inspired by Ortuño (1994), Knapp (2012) demonstrated how to integrate visual art in teaching undergraduate German language classes at all levels with detailed explanations of the instructional procedures, guiding questions, classroom activities, and homework assignments. Knapp suggested that paintings can be used to teach concrete vocabulary and grammatical concepts while familiarizing students with German artists in introductory courses. For the intermediate courses, Knapp suggested using paintings as a springboard for an imaginative writing project. For this project, students needed to describe the image they chose, reflect on why they chose it, draw a sketch of the artist, explain what school or movement the artist belonged to, and compare the artwork with another one either from the same period or of the same theme in another period. Knapp encouraged teachers, when teaching advanced literature or culture courses, to use visual arts to introduce aspects of literary texts, for example, using a painting or a set of paintings to introduce the key characteristics of "Romanticism" in literature.

Similarly, Sederberg (2013) showcased a fourth-semester content-based German course on modern German history incorporating museum visits in an American university. She believed that using a museum-based approach to teach a foreign language could promote students' aesthetic and affective learning experience, provide students with opportunities to access the target culture, and connect different disciplines and contexts of learning (i.e., personal, socio-cultural, and physical spheres). Students had four museum visits, two physical visits to museums on campus and two online visits to German museums, throughout the semester. Sederberg found that the online museum visits were more challenging because students could not have the affective engagement with real objects like in an actual museum. To meet this challenge, Sederberg suggested instructors link the online museum visits to classroom discussions, homework, or projects and give students more choices in choosing online museums.

In general, all these studies reported positive aspects of integrating art or art museum visits into the L2 or FL curriculum. However, it is not yet known how to implement this approach into the post-secondary CFL curriculum and what CFL learners think of this approach. Another limitation of the previous research lies in data types and data collection. Most of the studies mentioned above tended to be proposals or pedagogical reports that relied on informal student feedback (e.g., Díaz, 2016; Sederberg, 2013) or the author's reflections and observations (e.g., Berhó & Defferding, 2005; Knapp, 2012; Ortuño, 1994) as the only source of

information. Those efforts can barely be regarded as empirical research projects because methodological details such as data collection and analysis methods were often missing.

The current study aims to fill these research gaps. In the rest of this chapter, I will first present a college-level Chinese course that integrated visual arts and online art museum visits. Then, I will report on the evaluation of this approach in the course in light of student perceptions and the benefits and challenges of this approach based on quantitative and qualitative data collected through questionnaires and interviews. Specifically, this study focuses on the following three research questions:

RQ1. How do CFL learners perceive the approach of integrating visual arts and online museum visits into Chinese teaching in general?
RQ2. What are the benefits of integrating visual arts and online museum visits into CFL teaching?
RQ3. What are the challenges of integrating visual arts and online museum visits into CFL teaching, and what improvements can be made in the future?

3 An Art-Integrated Chinese Course

The course that integrated visual arts and online museum visits was an intermediate-level Chinese course at an private university in the southeastern US. The Chinese course was designed for non-heritage learners whose Chinese proficiencies ranged from intermediate-low to intermediate-mid based on ACTFL's proficiency guidelines (ACTFL, 2012). I, as the researcher of this study, was also the instructor of this course. The textbook used is *Integrated Chinese* (4th edition, Volume 4) (Liu et al., 2019). All lessons were covered in this course, except for the last one. The class met four times a week, 50 min on Mondays and Wednesdays and 75 min on Tuesdays and Thursdays. In the 2021 spring semester, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all teaching at this university was conducted online via Zoom, and physical visits to the art museum on campus were impossible. However, thanks to the internet, we could cross the physical boundaries and get access to bountiful art resources online and visit art museums around the world virtually. In this semester, I designed two classes that integrated visual arts and online museum visits: one after a lesson on gender equality in China and the other after a lesson on environmental protection and energy conservation.

The first art class was 50 min long and had two art activities. The first activity centered on racial inequality in the United States through an artwork titled *Fifty Shades of White* by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith.[1] It is a map of the United States with all states in varying shades of white paint, but the neighboring countries are in multiple colors. All fifty states are all labeled in the names of white paints carried by

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[1] https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/fifty-shades-of-white-jaune-quick-to-see-smith/TQGX HvDRBFzSpw?hl=en

hardware store brands, such as "White Peach" for Georgia and "Yucca White" for Texas. To prepare for students' discussion about the painting, I first showed students a regular American map and asked students to introduce their hometowns to each other in small groups. After this warm-up activity, I displayed the painting and asked students to discuss it in breakout rooms of 2–3 students on Zoom. I prepared a handout that listed useful vocabulary, grammatical structures, and discussion questions to facilitate students' discussions. Students were asked first to describe what they saw, share the names of their home states in the map of the painting, and then talk about the differences between the map in this painting and the regular American map and what the artist would like to convey through this painting. After this discussion, I showed students a third American map, which shows geographic variations of races in the United States. Races were marked in different colors. Then, students were asked to compare this map with the one in the painting and then discuss questions related to the multiracial reality and racial inequality in the United States. The second activity was an online visit to the Glasgow Women's Library[2] in the UK through the online platform Google Arts and Culture.[3] There were six online exhibit collections featuring feminism, gender inequality, LGBTQ, and women's suffrage. Students were asked to first self-explore the collections, pick one favorite artwork, and then orally present it in Chinese to other students in their small groups.

The second art class was 75 min long and was focused on art and the environment. The artwork used was the collection of "Taigu Descendants[4]" by a Chinese artist named Yongliang Yang. According to the introduction on his website, he "exploits a connection between traditional art and the contemporary, implementing ancient oriental aesthetics and literati beliefs with modern language and digital techniques" (Yang Yongliang Studio, n.d.). The collection of "Taigu Descendants" has six digital collages in the tradition of Chinese landscape painting. But when looking closely, you will find that the mountains are made of skyscrapers, demolition sites, and towers, reflecting the impact of rampant urbanization and its influences on the environment. To help students appreciate his artwork, the instructor decided to let students first learn how to enjoy traditional Chinese landscape paintings. So, the class started with a warm-up activity of talking about mountains guided by questions like "Do you like mountains? Why?," "What is your favorite mountain, and why do you like it," "How do you feel when you see mountains?," and "Do you know or have you been to any mountains in China?" Then the instructor briefly introduced the "Five Great Mountains of China" and the meaning of mountains in traditional Chinese culture. Following this introduction, the instructor showed two Chinese landscape paintings to students and asked them what they saw, how they felt about the paintings, and what kind of relationship between nature and humans could be inferred from the images. Students also watched a short video about how to appreciate Chinese landscape paintings. The video was in Chinese, but it had

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[2] https://artsandculture.google.com/partner/glasgow-womens-library

[3] https://artsandculture.google.com

[4] https://www.yangyongliang.com/new-gallery

English subtitles. After watching the video, the instructor asked students to look at the images again and discuss the characteristics and cultural meanings of the traditional Chinese landscape paintings. After all these preparations, the instructor asked students to explore Yang Yongliang's artwork in small groups of 2–3, pick one they liked, compare it with the traditional Chinese landscape paintings, and then discuss what the artist would like to convey through his art. The class ended with a self-exploration activity in which students could find an artwork related to environmental protection in social media and then share it with the class.

4   Methodology

4.1   Participants

Twenty-eight undergraduate students (16 females and 12 males, with an age range of 17–21 years old) who enrolled in the aforementioned intermediate Chinese language course at a private university in the southeast of the US participated in this study. Their Chinese proficiency ranged from intermediate low to intermediate mid based on ACTFL's proficiency guidelines (ACTFL, 2012). They were from various majors, but none of them were majoring in art or art history.

4.2   Data Collection and Analysis

The present study is mixed-methods research (Riazi & Candlin, 2014). Both quantitative data and qualitative data were obtained and analyzed to answer the research questions. The quantitative data were collected from an anonymous questionnaire (see "Appendix") at the end of the semester. This questionnaire included three parts. The first part included six items asking students' perceptions about integrating visual arts and online art museum visits into Chinese learning. For example, "Do you like the approach of integrating visual art or online art museum visits into Chinese learning?" Students were asked to either give ratings on a five-point Likert scale or choose one or multiple options from a list of multiple-answer questions and provide reasons for their ratings or choices. The second and third parts included 10 questions in total, and 9 of them were open-ended questions asking for students' feedback on the two art classes and their suggestions for future improvements.

Qualitative data were collected from both the open-ended questions in the second and third parts of the questionnaire and the semi-structured in-depth interviews to enrich and triangulate the quantitative data. Five out of the twenty-eight students who completed the survey participated in an individual interview voluntarily. Two of them were female, and the other three were male. Each interview was guided by two general questions: (1) What do you think of the two classes that integrated

online museum visits and visual arts this semester? What do you like, and what do you not like? (2) What do you think of the approach of integrating visual arts and online museum visits into Chinese language courses? Based on your experience, in what aspects do you think that you have benefited from this approach? What do you think we should change or improve when using this approach in the future? The interviews were open-ended and conducted in English. The participants were encouraged to talk as much as possible about the questions and other relevant topics that they proposed. Each interview lasted 15–20 min and was audio-recorded with permission. The recordings were first transcribed and then analyzed together with the quantitative data to answer the three research questions.

5   Results

5.1   Research Question 1: General Student Perceptions of the Art Integration Approach

To find out how the students perceived the art integration approach, their responses to the questionnaire item "Please rate how well you like the approach of integrating visual arts or online art museum visits into Chinese learning (on a 5-point scale, 1 = not at all, and 5 = a great deal)" were analyzed. As Table 1 shows, on average, students liked the approach very much ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 0.58$). The frequency of the students' ratings was also calculated to examine the distribution of the responses. Except for one student who rated a '3', all students either liked or liked very much the approach, providing ratings of '4' or '5'.

Based on the reasons that students provided for their ratings, students liked the approach because they thought it was "fun," "interesting," and "cool" in general. To be specific, they liked it because of the following three major reasons. First, they thought that it was a fun way of learning about the Chinese language and culture. Second, some students loved the "the real-life applicability" of the approach since it provided them with an opportunity to apply what they had learned in class to real life situations. A third reason was that art presented different interpretations or perspectives of critical issues like gender inequality and environmental protection.

Qualitative data from the semi-structured interview confirmed that students liked the approach because it provided them the opportunity to practice their oral skills while learning Chinese culture at the same time. For instance, one participant commented, "It is a good way for us to strengthen our speaking skills. Plus, the art-integrated classes went beyond learning Chinese vocabulary and grammar structures, and we also learned about Chinese culture." Moreover, one participant also

Table 1 Overall student perception of the art-integration approach

Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
3	5	4.46	0.58

mentioned in the interview that he liked this approach because it helped students use language in such an interesting way that it could motivate them to learn the language more.

5.2   Research Question 2: Student Perceptions of the Benefits of the Art-Integration Approach

Students were also asked to rate how much they thought they benefited from the art integration approach (on a 5-point scale, 1 = not at all, and 5 = a great deal). A summary of the ratings is presented in Table 2. The results show that students, in general, thought that they had benefited a lot from the approach. The frequency of students' ratings confirmed this finding. Even though eight students provided a rating of 3, the other twenty students rated it as a 4 or 5.

Another question on the questionnaire was, "In what aspects do you think that you have benefited from this approach?" Students were asked to choose all that were applicable to them from the options listed in Table 3. The percentage of each option was calculated to find out the aspects that most people found beneficial. As shown in Table 3, more than two-thirds of students thought that they had gains in their knowledge about Chinese art or art in general, motivation for learning Chinese language and culture, speaking ability in real-life situations, ability to appreciate artwork, or interest in learning Chinese arts or arts in general. However, fewer than half of the students thought they were more confident in using Chinese in real-life

Table 2 Student perceptions of how beneficial the art-integration approach is

Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
3	5	3.96	0.79

Table 3 Perceived benefits of the art-integration approach

Aspects	Percentages (%)
It expanded my Chinese vocabulary.	79.3
It improved my Chinese speaking ability in real-life situations.	69
It motivated me to learn more about the Chinese language and culture.	82.8
It increased my knowledge of Chinese arts or arts in general.	93.1
It developed my ability to appreciate artworks.	62.1
It raised my interest in learning Chinese art and arts in general.	62.1
It improved my confidence in using Chinese in real-life situations.	44.8
Other, please explain.	0

situations. One of the possible reasons is that talking about art in a foreign language is challenging, and many students may find it difficult. Thus, they may feel that doing art activities in Chinese cannot improve their confidence in using Chinese.

Interview data further revealed that students thought that they had benefited from the art-integration approach in many aspects. The first significant benefit was related to language learning. Students believed that the art-integration approach provided them with an excellent opportunity to practice what they had learned in new contexts. It also improved their ability to use language in unfamiliar situations, such as talking about art. For example, one participant stated, "I think my language skills were better because I was trying to use our language to describe something in-depth that's not in a textbook…we have to pull all our knowledge together." Another participant further pointed out, "It's more hands-on to talk about impactful topics through art." These quotes highlighted students' appreciation of being able to use their Chinese to talk about issues related to their life, which is essential for foreign language learners since they have limited opportunities to apply their Chinese skills outside the classroom.

The second benefit mentioned in the interview is increased knowledge and interest in Chinese art. For instance, one participant said, "One of the important benefits of this approach, for me, is that I can learn about Chinese art because I knew nothing about it before. But now, I feel like I have good background knowledge of it." Students also revealed that this approach had raised their interest in learning about Chinese art and culture because they enjoyed the Chinese artworks shown to them. As a result, some students started "looking for interesting Chinese artists and following them on social media," which they admitted that they would not have done if they hadn't gotten to know Chinese art and artists in the art-integrated classes. Several students even mentioned that they would like to visit China and see Chinese art in person after the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the interview, participants also mentioned that the art-integration approach did motivate them to learn the Chinese language and culture, but to different extents. Two participants shared enthusiastically that this approach had inspired them to further study the Chinese language and culture. They also mentioned that they incorporated what they had acquired from the art-integrated classes into their final course projects. However, the other three participants were less confirmative about the motivational benefit of this approach because they thought that not everyone enjoyed art in general or the artwork shown to them. For instance, one participant disclosed, "It does motivate me to look at Chinese art more. But I don't know if it would for most people." Echoing this statement, another participant further pointed out, "It depends on whether the artwork resonates with the student. In my case, it motivated me to learn Chinese and Chinese culture to some extent. But for other students, art may not be that interesting."

5.3   Research Question 3: Challenges of Integrating Art into CFL Instruction and Future Improvements

Despite the general positive student perceptions of the art-integration approach, three significant challenges surfaced from the qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questions in the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews. The first challenge stemmed from the difficulties of interpreting artworks in a foreign language. These difficulties may result from students' inadequate knowledge about the artwork or of the language to talk about it. For example, one student commented, "I enjoyed the class, but I think it was complicated to talk about the artwork because I was less familiar with maps and libraries, but it was a great opportunity to apply our language to a real-life context." Another student echoed, "I think the class was very engaging, but it was challenging to use Chinese vocabulary to explain my thoughts on the artwork."

The second challenge was related to artwork selection. Ideally, the chosen artwork should be, first of all, relevant to what students are learning so that they can apply what they have learned in a real-life context. The artwork should also be interesting enough to arouse students' interest in talking or learning about Chinese. In reality, however, it is very challenging to select such an artwork since it requires teachers to put a lot of thought and time into researching what is available and then weighing the appropriateness of students' language ability and the artwork's theme before making a decision. More importantly, students in this study showed different preferences about what kind of artwork should be used in class. One student commented, "Discussing Chinese artwork is interesting since it is an area that I am less familiar with and enjoy learning more. But using Chinese to discuss non-Chinese artwork is also valuable." Another student also pointed out that, "I don't care whether we discuss Chinese artwork or western artwork. Any artwork that is relevant to what we are learning about in class would be good." However, some students cared more about learning Chinese culture than the thematic connection of the artwork to the lesson, which can be seen from this comment: "Personally, I liked learning about the artwork from a cultural standpoint, and didn't care too much about tying in course themes." As for the types of Chinese artwork, students also had different preferences. Some students preferred traditional Chinese artwork because of its rich embodiment of culture. Other students favored modern artwork (such as digital art) because it is "cool," "engaging," or "different than what we usually see or know."

The third challenge pertained to discussing sensitive topics like race and gender inequality in class. Even though students thought that the artworks used were appropriate and engaging, they felt it was hard to talk about race and gender inequality in class. As a student disclosed in the interview, one possible reason was that, "Students are always a little bit uncomfortable, a little on edge, when the issue of race comes up because firstly people don't want to say wrong things. Therefore, they are less volunteering to contribute to the discussion."

Nevertheless, all five interviewed students agreed that it was vital to talk about social justice issues, and artwork was a good discussion starter. For example, one student said, "Whatever the artists are trying to show in their artwork is a good conversation starter. That can lead to more difficult topics to talk about, like racism and things like that." Another student echoed, "using art to start conversations about social justice issues is a very creative way, which I feel like starting to talk about is the hardest part, especially in a language class because no one knows what to say." A third student added, "Having people talk about difficult topics through the art is a good way to make it not be judgmental or make anyone feel bad because you show a piece of art and ask people to tell their opinions on it."

When asked about what could be improved in the future, students suggested spending more time learning new vocabulary or grammar structures before class in the future. However, they thought that the handout prepared by the instructor was helpful ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.94$, ratings on a 5-point scale, 1 = not at all, and 5 = a great deal). In addition, some students thought it would be good if they could learn the cultural background of the artwork before class, either by asking students "to watch a section of a movie or TV that is culturally relevant" or "to prepare materials before class (such as, find an artwork on social media before class)" or "to read a short article or watch a video that they could then reference during the discussion." In so doing, they thought it would "make students better prepared for class discussion" and "spare more time for discussion in class."

Moreover, students suggested, when handling difficult topics like social justice issues, teachers may "create a safe and open space for students to share their thoughts from the first day of the course," "ask students to do some readings about the issues beforehand so that they'll have more to bring into the discussion," "check students' state of mind and feelings during the discussion," "make sure that students have learned the terminology about how to talk about the hard issues in Chinese," and "put students into small groups of 2 or 3 for such discussions so that they feel less judgmental and more comfortable to share."

6   Discussion

Consistent with previous studies on integrating visual arts or art museum visits into the post-secondary foreign language curriculum (Berhó & Defferding, 2005; Díaz, 2016; Knapp, 2012; Ortuño, 1994; Sederberg, 2013), this mixed-methods study found that the art-integration approach was, in general, well-received among CFL students who were learning an intermediate Chinese course at a U.S. private university. In particular, these students enjoyed learning the Chinese language and culture through art. They thought that the art-integration approach was engaging and rewarding. The visual art materials and the online museum visits spurred their interest in learning the Chinese language and culture. As Li and Zhang (2016) point out, the culture learning in current collegiate CFL curriculums focus on cultural products and practices rather than perspectives. They also reveal that the culture learning

at the elementary level and part of the intermediate level is through reading some cultural information attached to the main text. In contrast, the culture teaching at the advanced level is through learning Chinese-specific topics, such as Chinese opera. The art-integration approach piloted in this study provides students with an opportunity to learn different cultural perspectives on an issue (such as gender inequality or environmental protection in China and the U.S.), which may be one of the possible solutions to this problem.

Students in this study also appreciated the opportunity to use their Chinese language skills in real-life applications. Through enjoying and discussing artworks, they could connect their Chinese learning with real-world issues (like racism, gender inequality, and environmental protection) and other disciplines (like art, humanities, and science). This benefit of the art-integration approach, therefore, makes boundary-crossing possible for CFL teachers. With this approach, CFL faculty can develop an interdisciplinary curriculum that is culturally rich and intellectually rigorous, which will answer the MLA's call in 2007 for a curricular transformation in collegiate FL education.

Unlike previous research, this study also examined the challenges of the art-integration approach and students' suggestions for future improvement. The challenges found in this study are noteworthy because they will provide useful insights for future pedagogical applications of the art-integration approach in the CFL curriculum. First of all, the first challenge was that learning or talking about art in a foreign language may be too hard for L2 or FL learners, which is likely to be one of the CFL teachers' common concerns about using art materials. This concern is validated because some CFL students in this study did find it hard to talk about art in Chinese. However, teachers may design some warm-up activities to prepare students for later discussion of the artwork, as the instructor did in this study. Also, teachers may follow the suggestion proposed by students in this study, namely asking students to study relevant vocabulary and grammatical structures, or read some articles or watch videos about the artworks before class. Another suggestion is that teachers can ask students (especially those in lower-level Chinese language courses) to "read and discuss in English about related cultural topics while using Chinese expressions where they could, so they would not have to be limited by their Chinese language ability and could engage in more sophisticated and intellectually challenging conversations." (Li & Zhang, 2016, p. 150).

The second challenge was that teachers may find it difficult to select an artwork that is both interesting and relevant to students' learning because students may have different interests or preferences. In this study, some students preferred Chinese artworks without caring about whether the theme or the issue depicted in the painting was relevant to what they were learning. In contrast, other students cared more about the relevance than the cultural origin of the artwork. However, this challenge should not hinder CFL teachers from trying the art-integration approach because the online platforms (like Google Arts and Culture) have a vast pool of visual art materials and online art museums for teachers to use. Besides, teachers may also ask students to explore the online art collections or museums to find artwork of their

interests, do some research about it, and then present it orally in class or write an essay about it in Chinese.

Last but not least, students in this study thought that using art was a good way to start conversations about social justice issues like race and gender inequality. However, some students may find it hard to talk about such topics in language classes because they may feel uncomfortable or fear being misunderstood or judged by their peers. To meet this challenge, as students suggested, teachers may try to create an open and safe space for students to share their thoughts without being judged, have students discuss in pairs or small groups, and check with students about their feelings during the discussion. Another suggestion is that teachers may ask students to clarify or repeat their ideas in English if students think there is a chance of being misunderstood when they first expressed in Chinese.

7 Conclusion

This mixed-methods study reported on the student perceptions about and the benefits and some challenges of integrating visual arts into the post-secondary CFL curriculum. The CFL students' positive perceptions of the art-integration approach indicated the pedagogical potential of this approach in teaching CFL and transforming the CFL curriculum.

The challenges identified in this study offer valuable insights for future integration of visual art into Chinese language courses, such as preparing students for the discussion of artworks with warm-up activities or various assignments before class, exploring online resources for artwork selection or online art museum visits, asking students to select artworks of their interest, making conscious adjustments when handling complex topics, and allowing students to use English to engage students in sophisticated conversations or reduce their anxiety about being misunderstood because of their limited Chinese language ability.

However, the insights generated in this study would not be possible if boundaries had not been crossed between disciplines, research methodologies, and instructional environments. First, the art-integration approach depicted in this study has connected Chinese language education with humanities, art appreciation, and critical social issues like race and gender inequality. This innovative teaching pedagogy, if adopted, will enable language educators to cross disciplinary boundaries and develop an interdisciplinary language curriculum, which answers the MLA's call in 2007. Second, the mixed-method research design combines quantitative and qualitative research paradigms, exemplifying the boundary-crossing between research methodologies. Third, the COVID-19 pandemic has driven all educators to cross the boundaries between two different teaching environments: face-to-face teaching and online teaching. With this boundary-crossing, I was able to take advantage of online art resources and the VR technology that makes it possible to visit art museums around the world virtually. Therefore, these boundary-crossings not only made this

study possible but also deepened our understanding of the art-integrated approach and the complexity of language education.

Despite its significances, this study has a number of limitations. First, this study focused on student perceptions of the benefits of the art-integration approach, with little attention to students' learning outcomes. Second, this study did not include CFL teachers' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of the art-integration approach, which could otherwise provide additional insights. Third, although the findings of this study demonstrated the pedagogical potential of the art-integration approach, more studies are needed to examine how to use this approach in all levels of Chinese language courses and content-based courses so as to establish successful practical models for CFL teachers to adopt. All these areas need to be improved or further investigated in future research.

Appendix: Questionnaire

Part I. Art-Integrated Approach

1. Do you like the approach of integrating visual arts and online art museum visits (referred to as the art-integrated approach hereafter) into Chinese learning?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	A great deal

2. Why do you like or not like it? Please explain.
3. How much do you think that you have benefited from the art-integrated approach?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	A great deal

4. In what aspects that you have benefited? (Please check all the answers that apply to you)

  ☐ expanded my Chinese vocabulary
  ☐ improved my Chinese speaking ability in real-life situations
  ☐ motivated me to learn more about Chinese language and culture
  ☐ increased my Knowledge of Chinese arts or arts in general
  ☐ developed my ability to appreciate art works
  ☐ increased my interests of learning Chinese art and arts in general
  ☐ increased my confidence of using Chinese in real-life situations
  ☐ other, please explain

5. Do you suggest that we should continue integrating visual arts and museum visits into this Chinese course?

   ◯ Yes

   ◯ No

   ◯ Maybe

6. For the artwork used, which do you prefer?

   ◯ I prefer Chinese artwork.

   ◯ I prefer American artwork.

   ◯ No preference, any artwork that is relevant will be fine.

Part II. First Art Class

1. Do you like this class? Why or why not?
2. Which part of this class do you like more, the discussion of the artwork or the visit to the women's library? Why?
3. Are the visual art works and activities relevant to what we are learning? Why?
4. How useful do you think of the handout?

                   1   2   3   4   5

Not useful at all ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Very useful

5. What should we improve or change if we do similar art activities in the future? Please tell us your suggestions.

Part III. Second Art Class

1. Do you like this class? Why or why not?
2. Which part of this class do you like more, the discussion of the artwork or the visit to the women's library? Why?
3. Are the visual art works and activities relevant to what we are learning? Why?
4. Which art class do you like better, the previous one or this one? Why?
5. What should we improve or change if we do similar art activities in the future? Please tell us your suggestions.

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