

The Cultivation of International Communication Ability in Foreign Language Teaching: “Telling the Chinese Story Well”

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Abstract: Since 2016, the General Secretary has repeatedly emphasized to strengthen the cultivation of international communication ability, emphasizing that foreign languages are the link of international communication and it has become a key factor in focusing on telling the Chinese story. The cultivation of international communication ability and the mutual learning of world civilizations need to shoulder new responsibilities of foreign language education. Foreign language education needs to build and enhance civilization mutual learning as its own responsibility, and promote theoretical and practical innovation. This article is based on the background, basic concepts, framework building, and summary thinking of international communication ability.

Keywords: International communication ability; Telling Chinese stories well; Cross-cultural communication

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1. Background of international communication abilities

1.1. The background and significance of the research

In the 30th collective study meeting, the General Secretary clearly pointed out that telling Chinese stories well, spreading China’s voice, presenting a true and comprehensive Chinese image is an urgent task for the international communication ability cultivation in our country. To achieve this goal, it is emphasized that a strategic communication system with distinct Chinese characteristics must be established, focusing on enhancing the influence of international communication, the appeal of Chinese culture, the affinity of the Chinese image, the persuasiveness of Chinese discourse, and the guidance of international public opinion. Against this backdrop, how to accurately and vividly convey China’s voice to the world and present a true, multi-dimensional, and comprehensive image of China has become an important issue that needs to be urgently addressed.

Telling Chinese stories well is the core task of enhancing China’s international communication capabilities. China has a long history, splendid culture, and rich development experience, all of which are valuable materials

for telling Chinese stories. From the ancient Silk Road to the modern “Belt and Road Initiative,” from the Four Great Inventions to scientific and technological innovation achievements, from Confucianism to the core socialist values, Chinese stories contain profound cultural heritage and powerful spiritual strength. Telling Chinese stories well can not only enhance the international community’s understanding and recognition of China and improve China’s international image and influence, but also promote exchanges and mutual learning among different cultures and contribute to the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

1.2. Research status at home and abroad

In the research field of cultivating international communication capabilities, foreign countries started relatively early, and their research systems are more mature. Foreign scholars focus on deeply analyzing the connotation and constituent elements of international communication capabilities from the perspectives of multiple disciplines such as cross-cultural communication studies, linguistics, and sociology. For example, in terms of language ability, they explore the best paths and methods of language learning through empirical research to improve the accuracy and fluency of communicators’ language expression in international exchanges. In the research on cross-cultural communication ability, with the help of a large number of case analyses and on-site investigations, they deeply discuss issues such as communication models under different cultural backgrounds, the impact of cultural differences on communication effects, and how to effectively overcome cultural barriers. In the research on information acquisition and processing capabilities, foreign scholars keep up with the pace of the times and focus on the application of new media technologies in international communication. They study how to use advanced technical means such as big data and artificial intelligence to achieve accurate information acquisition, efficient analysis, and effective dissemination.

In China, the research on cultivating international communication capabilities has developed rapidly in recent years and achieved fruitful results. Scholars have carried out extensive and in-depth discussions on aspects such as the connotation, importance, and cultivation paths of international communication capabilities. In terms of connotation definition, by combining China’s national conditions with the actual needs of international communication, it has been clarified that international communication capabilities not only include basic elements such as language ability and cross-cultural communication ability but also cover the ability requirements for shaping the national image and guiding international public opinion. In the research on cultivation paths, constructive opinions and suggestions have been put forward from multiple dimensions such as education and teaching reform, innovation of talent cultivation models, and expansion of communication channels.

1.3. The target of the research

As teachers of public foreign language courses in universities, we should be based on the new era. The purpose of improving international communication abilities is to be able to tell Chinese stories better and let the world better understand China. The core of Chinese stories is the Chinese people, who create these stories and become the real subject of the story. This means that the storytellers of Chinese stories should be diverse, including not only the government and official media, but also the public, especially the ordinary people’s real stories are more likely to move people. In this process, foreign language education in universities plays an important role. Hundreds of thousands of students who major in foreign languages should master the skills to tell Chinese stories in foreign languages, and improve their proficiency in foreign languages. This will enable them to spread Chinese images through various channels and tell the stories of ordinary Chinese people in different ways.

2. Basic concepts of international communication ability

2.1. What is the “Chinese Story” about?

In the process of developing students' international communication skills, a key aspect involves enabling them to narrate Chinese stories in English. However, there are some challenges in expressing Chinese stories in English. A major challenge is the content of Chinese stories. English, as a global language, attracts a diverse audience with different cultural backgrounds^[1]. It is a subtle balancing act to connect with people from different cultural backgrounds through delicate narratives, at the same time maintaining the authenticity of Chinese stories. Firstly, they oversimplify the Chinese story and equate it with traditional culture, this kind of definition of Chinese culture is narrow and static. Secondly, their understanding of Chinese culture is relatively shallow, and they fail to keep up with the development of age. Therefore, we believe that the telling of “Chinese stories” should cover a wider range, including the story of 5,000 years of excellent traditional Chinese culture, the story of China's reform and opening up, the story of Chinese modernization process, the story of actively participating in the construction of the global governance system, and the story of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, etc., so that students can more fully understand and grasp China's past, present, and future. In short, in order to develop international communication abilities, telling Chinese stories in English requires a comprehensive understanding of the language, culture, and technical challenges. Overcoming these issues requires a strategic approach that both preserves the authenticity of the Chinese narrative and ensures that it resonates with different English-speaking audiences.

2.2. Where is the “Chinese Story” told?

“Telling the Chinese story well” requires a rational and logical way of discourse dissemination. Through the down-to-earth, simple, effective, and inspiring discourse expression, we can correctly and clearly, objectively and systematically explain China to the world thoroughly; let the world understand China as well as let China understand the world.

The “Chinese stories” can be told on multiple occasions. On the international stage, in international conferences such as the United Nations General Assembly and the World Economic Forum, they can convey China's concepts and development achievements to political leaders and elites from all over the world. On international media platforms, such as Reuters, CNN, etc. (now there are also more and more channels for international media initiatives led by or in cooperation with China to voice their opinions), with the help of their extensive influence, various Chinese stories can be disseminated so as to enhance China's international discourse power.

2.3. Why the need to tell the “Chinese Story?”

Telling the “Chinese story” is not only an inevitable requirement to enhance our country's cultural soft power and international communication abilities, but also an urgent need for confidence and firmness in Chinese path. In the context of the current global economic integration, we need not only to show the world the fascinating “Chinese story,” but also to make the world understand China more objectively and comprehensively through these stories, so as to enhance our cultural soft power and international impact of dissemination. At the same time, we must also promote these stories at home, build consensus and gather people's hearts through the “Chinese story,” and provide strong spiritual support for our confidence and firmness on the Chinese road.

2.4. How to tell the “Chinese story?”

It is a creative and educational task to combine English teaching with Chinese stories. By skillfully blending English learning with Chinese cultural narratives, students can not only improve their language skills, but also enhance their understanding of Chinese culture. Here are some ways to combine English teaching with Chinese stories ^[2]:

- (1) Choosing a theme story: Choosing a theme story from Chinese cultural heritage, such as “Sun Wukong Subdues the White-Bone Demon,” “Cowherd and Weaver Girl,” etc. These stories are unique to Chinese culture as well as interesting and educational.
- (2) Clear teaching objectives: Clarifying teaching objectives, such as improving students’ listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills while conveying the core values of Chinese culture through stories to ensure that the teaching content is closely integrated with the storyline.
- (3) Making a curriculum plan: Developing a complete curriculum plan, including the introduction of stories, vocabulary teaching, grammar point explanation, reading activities, oral practice, etc. Ensure that each link is closely related to Chinese stories in order to form an organic teaching chain.
- (4) Creating contexts: Using story plots to create context so that students can immerse in the context of Chinese culture, and help students better understand and apply their newly learned language knowledge through role-playing, situational dialogue, and other means.
- (5) Multimedia support: Using multimedia resources, such as pictures and videos, to display Chinese stories to stimulate students’ interests. At the same time, audio resources can be used to provide authentic voice input to help students practice their listening skills.
- (6) Language assessment: Designing language assessment activities according to the story plots, including listening comprehension testing, oral expression, writing, etc. Through the assessments, the teachers can know the students’ mastery of English knowledge and their understanding of Chinese culture.
- (7) Cultural experience: Having students participate in some cultural experience activities, such as tasting traditional Chinese cuisine, making handicrafts, etc., so that students can experience Chinese culture in a more comprehensive way.

3. International communication ability framework

In the new era of foreign language teaching, it is necessary to cultivate students’ cultural understanding ability, foreign language narrative ability, and international communication ability. The overall narrative ability of Chinese college students is poor, and foreign language teaching research and practice do not pay much attention to this problem ^[3]. Even if they use their mother tongue, college students still need to improve the cohesion and coherence of their narrative in macro and micro structure. In the process of “telling China,” there are some concerns about deep-seated aspects such as “communication attitude,” “discourse system,” “consensus trust,” and “discourse responsibility.” Students need to have a deeper understanding of Chinese culture, including history, traditions, values, etc., which requires them to invest more time and energy in research to ensure that they can accurately convey the cultural connotations about Chinese stories to the world. Some Chinese stories may involve historical events or traditions in China, which require students to have a deeper understanding of these aspects. This may require them to consult historical materials and read relevant works to ensure that they can provide accurate background information when telling the story. Students need to take into account the development of Chinese society and current events when choosing the content of the story. Understanding the dynamics of contemporary Chinese society is helpful to build a more in-depth storyline and background, which

may include research on social issues, cultural phenomena, and technological progress. China is a multi-ethnic and multicultural country, and students need to pay attention to the diversity when telling Chinese stories. This may involve the cultural nuance of different regions, the traditions of ethnic minorities, etc., which requires students to present these diverse elements through in-depth research. In Chinese stories, characters are an important element. Students need to dig deeper into the characters in the story to understand their personality, motivations, and growth experiences in order to more vividly present the images in the story. At the same time, teachers should redefine foreign language education teaching in the Chinese context. In the Chinese context, foreign language education teaching is a process of cultivating students' foreign language skills and cross-cultural communication skills with Chinese as their mother tongue. Overall, before the 21st century, the construction of a foreign language education knowledge system had the characteristics of being able to connect ancient and modern China with foreign countries, as well as advance multiple education and teaching ideas simultaneously. It is both epochal and political, but the influence of Western discourse is still significant. After the 21st century, foreign language people began to innovate the theories of foreign language education that are suitable for the Chinese context, and recognized by Western peers. The "new liberal arts" of foreign language education not only means cross-integration of foreign languages, foreign literature, educational theories, learning theories, and non-disciplinary factors such as new technologies, but also represents a solution to the current and future complex realities of foreign language education in China. The path of "new liberal arts" is the research that breaks the boundaries between disciplines and non-disciplines. The biggest core is to solve the conflicts in different cultures, ideologies, and political systems.

4. Summary and reflections on international communication abilities

4.1. The quality of the course determines its important role

University foreign language courses, as both instrumental and humanistic general education courses, have always met the needs of national talent training, kept pace with the times, and played an important role in the cultivation of "telling Chinese stories well."

4.2. The content of the course helps "tell Chinese stories well"

The content of university foreign language courses is constantly being updated to help students understand Chinese culture more deeply and systematically, which provides effective input for "telling Chinese stories well." The curriculum content needs to break the "one-way input" model of traditional foreign language teaching and strengthen the orientation of local culture output ^[4].

4.3. The accomplishments of curriculum design goals improve cross-cultural narrative ability

The teaching design of university foreign language courses should have a clear concept, accurate goals, scientific design, and be targeted to improve students' cross-cultural narrative ability by organizing online and offline diverse teaching tasks. The curriculum design needs to establish a three-level ability cultivation system of "cognition - comprehension - innovation":

4.4. Teachers be the first to "tell the Chinese story well"

University foreign language teachers should have a certain degree of cross-cultural awareness, cross-cultural knowledge, and cross-cultural ability, and strengthen the learning of advanced Chinese culture. Teachers are the

primary persons responsible for cultivating international communication capabilities and need to achieve “three transformations” [5].

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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