

A Practical Study on Integrating Chinese Culture into the Comprehensive English Course

Li Zhang*, Juan Zhang

Xinjiang Normal University, Urumqi 830054, Xinjiang, China

**Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.*

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Abstract: Integrating Chinese culture into classroom teaching is a requirement for the ideological and political construction of courses in institutions of higher learning. Due to its disciplinary attributes, the Comprehensive English course bears the mission of fostering cultural confidence and telling Chinese stories well in English. To fulfill this mission and responsibility of Comprehensive English in terms of Chinese culture, this paper proposes practical paths for integrating Chinese culture into the course. It suggests focusing on textbook texts to explore cultural elements, expanding resources to enhance the representational ability of cultural content, demonstrating diverse cultural investigation methods through in-depth teaching, innovating tasks to improve the communication power of Chinese culture, and emphasizing evaluation to pay attention to the effect of Chinese culture learning. By doing so, Chinese culture can be integrated into teaching, and students' ability to tell Chinese stories well in English can be enhanced.

Keywords: Chinese culture; Comprehensive English; Cultural teaching; Tell Chinese stories well

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1. Introduction

Chinese culture is an important part of the ideological and political construction of courses in institutions of higher learning, and it is the foundation for college students to foster cultural confidence. As a discipline where multiple cultures converge, foreign language studies attach great importance to cultivating cultural confidence. The Teaching Guidelines for Undergraduate Programs in Foreign Languages and Literatures in Regular Institutions of Higher Learning clearly states the requirement: "Cultivate English professionals with Chinese feelings, international vision, and firm confidence in Chinese culture, who adhere to the stance of Chinese culture in the exchange and mutual learning of civilizations, and tell Chinese stories well and spread Chinese voices effectively" ^[1]. Against this backdrop, Comprehensive English, as a basic course for English majors, is duty-bound to take on the contemporary responsibility of broadening international horizons, enhancing cultural confidence, and telling Chinese stories well. However, in teaching practice, due to the course's fundamental nature, a large proportion of time is allocated to English basic skills training, while

cultural attention is insufficient. The integration of Chinese culture is relatively low, and the integration methods are rather single. Additionally, there are problems such as insufficient depth in Chinese culture learning and inadequate development of students' ability to tell Chinese stories well. Therefore, based on teaching practice, this paper discusses the inherent significance, existing problems, and integration paths of Chinese culture in the Comprehensive English course, aiming to contribute to the course's fulfillment of its due responsibilities.

2. The proper meaning of Chinese culture in integrated English courses

Linguistic symbols are the necessary tools and conditions for cultural communication and inheritance, serving as the carrier of culture^[2]. "All cultures are acquired through learning, and in the process of cultural learning, various interactive transmission methods used by people usually rely on language"^[3]. Due to its wide range of humanistic themes, integrated English has a unique advantage in cultivating cultural awareness. In terms of Chinese cultural cultivation, integrated English courses should aim to build cultural confidence and present a credible, adorable, and respectable image of China to the world, with Chinese traditional culture, core values, and various cultural achievements of the new era as the content of Chinese cultural learning.

3. Objectives of Chinese cultural cultivation in integrated English courses

3.1. Builds cultural confidence

"Culture is the soul of a country and a nation". "A nation prospers when its culture prospers, and a nation is strong when its culture is strong". "Strengthening cultural confidence is a major issue that concerns the rise and fall of the country, cultural security, and the independence of the national spirit". For those engaged in foreign language-related fields, cultural confidence is the foundation for cross-cultural communication and the stance and basic attitude for cultural exchange and mutual learning. "If the value of Chinese cultural awareness in language learning is ignored, cross-cultural communication will lose its due foundation of discourse power"^[4]. In foreign language education, an international perspective and cross-cultural communication skills should be based on Chinese feelings and cultural roots^[5]. Therefore, integrated English courses need to guide students to establish national cultural confidence on the premise of learning, understanding, and respecting foreign cultures, and avoid the tendency of worshipping foreign things and belittling China while praising the West.

3.2. Presents a credible, adorable, and respectable image of China to the world

National image refers to the understanding and evaluation of a country's politics, economy, society, culture, geography, and other aspects by domestic and foreign publics^[6]. The construction of national image targets two groups: domestic and foreign. Currently, the international presentation of China's national image is a requirement for the "Belt and Road" Initiative and the country's external publicity. As an important international language, English is a key tool for "telling Chinese stories well" and "spreading Chinese voices". For example, by learning how to narrate in English, tell Chinese stories about cultural China, model China, and contemporary China, we can present a credible, adorable, and respectable national image to the world. To this end, integrated English courses need to improve students' ability to represent and disseminate Chinese culture simultaneously.

3.3. Enriches the contents of Chinese cultural learning in Integrated English course

Culture refers to "the sum of material and spiritual wealth created by humans in the process of social and historical development, especially spiritual wealth such as literature, art, education, and science"^[7]. Therefore,

the content of Chinese culture in Integrated English courses should also cover various aspects, such as Chinese traditional culture, local native culture, core values, and various civilizational achievements of the new era. In addition, Integrated English is a course that cultivates students' comprehensive English skills, and the themes of the selected materials involve rich fields such as man and nature, man and society, and man and self, including material culture such as clothing, food, architecture, transportation, behavioral culture such as etiquette and customs, institutional culture such as economy, politics, law, education, and spiritual culture such as ideological theories, moral norms, literature, and art. All these themes can be integrated with Chinese culture^[8].

4. Implementation paths for integrating Chinese culture

To fulfill the mission and responsibility of Integrated English regarding Chinese culture, the following section explores strategies for integrating Chinese culture based on teaching examples from Volumes 1–4 of *A Course in Comprehensive English* (3rd Edition) by Zou Weicheng.

4.1. Focus on textbook texts and explore cultural elements

Textbooks are the main front for cultural teaching, and the excavation of textbook texts is primarily aimed at finding connection points for Chinese culture to naturally integrate it. To this end, teachers should deeply explore the connotations and context of textbooks, skillfully identify entry points for Chinese stories from ancient and modern times, ensure that education on the connotations of Chinese culture is naturally permeated in teaching, and inspire diverse thinking through group text reading. For example, Unit 1 of Book 2 focuses on the topic of the relationship between humans and animals under the theme of “Man and Nature”, including a total of five texts.

The first is a listening text in the form of an interview, which tells the story of an American father taking his child to visit a chicken farm, where the living conditions of the chickens made the child uncomfortable. The second text is a cartoon showing a couple taking a little girl to see a black bear exhibition: two bears are kept behind iron bars, and the father bear is holding a sign outside the bars that reads “My son is innocent”. The third text, “The Snake Bite”, is a narrative that tells the story of an American rural boy who was bitten on the foot by a snake while picking watermelons; his mother then took first-aid measures and finally asked a neighbor for help to send him to the hospital, where he was saved. The fourth text is Emily Dickinson's poem “Snake”, which describes the snake's elusive presence in the grass. The fifth text is a short expository passage for dictation, which talks about the importance of pets in British culture.

Additionally, there is a narrative entitled “Misunderstanding”, which tells the story of a pet baboon and a chicken during the mid-19th century when a British regiment was stationed in Jamaica: the baboon loved the chicken extremely, but its way of showing affection was a torment for the chicken, which eventually could not bear it and died. Finally, the cultural information section is designed as a cultural research task entitled “Friends or Enemies”, which presents the symbolic meanings of various animals in British and American cultures and requires students to explore the characteristics of these animals in Chinese culture through interviews. The theme, topic, and task types of this unit all provide connection points for Chinese culture, which can be linked to cultural information such as discussions on the relationship between humans and animals in Chinese culture, Chinese poultry farming methods, traditional Chinese pets, the metaphorical meanings of various animals in Chinese culture, and the differences between Chinese and Western auspicious animals.

4.2. Expand resources to enhance the representational ability of cultural content

For the Chinese cultural connection points based on textbook themes, teachers need to expand resources to expose students to sufficient linguistic representations of Chinese culture. Specifically, two types of English resources can be utilized. First, classic Chinese cultural translations or original English works. For example, various English translations of *A Dream of Red Mansions* and Lin Yutang's *Moment in Peking* depict all aspects of traditional Chinese culture against different historical backdrops, providing rich linguistic representations for describing China in various periods. Regarding the animal theme of this unit, teachers can expand by introducing Xu Yuanchong's English translation of "Ode to the Goose" from his *300 Tang Poems*, and also supplement Yuan Zhen's "Ba Snake" to echo Emily Dickinson's "Snake", allowing students to appreciate the unique rhythmic beauty of Chinese and English poetry respectively. In addition, teachers can ask students to consult *A Dictionary of English Translations of Chinese Proverbs and Maxims* or English versions of books from the series on inheriting fine traditional Chinese culture published in recent years, to read animal-related proverbs, maxims, and idiom stories, such as "Gouweixudiao" (Wagging the dog) and "Jiaotusanku" (The wily hare). The second type is multimodal resources from various online platforms.

4.3. In-depth teaching to demonstrate diverse cultural investigation methods

On the basis of strengthening students' knowledge of English representations of Chinese cultural content, students also need to learn methodological knowledge for investigating cultural phenomena, such as comparison, analysis, evaluation, and innovation, as well as value-based knowledge regarding attitudes, perspectives, and emotions toward culture, including cultural differences, building cultural confidence, and daring to engage in critical thinking and innovation.

Therefore, in teaching cultural content, various cultural investigation methods should be applied in combination with the cultivation of critical thinking skills. For instance, Unit 11 "Man and Society" in Book 2 discusses topics related to school education systems and introduces the educational systems of Britain and the United States. When integrating cultural knowledge about China's ancient and contemporary school education systems, teachers can conduct comparisons and explanations based on differences between Chinese and Western examination systems. When sorting out information from the unit's second text "Teenager's Nightmare," teachers can ask students about the synesthetic content in the text with questions like "Do you feel the same way?" to arouse resonance and engagement.

Furthermore, when content different from Chinese culture appears, teachers can incorporate a cultural perspective by asking questions such as, when did the phenomenon of receiving report cards via mail occur? Why was that the case? Is this still true today? How do you receive your grades? This enables students to gain explanations for social phenomena mentioned in various texts from historical, social, and cultural perspectives, thereby learning how to conduct cultural analysis and evaluation. In this process, teachers can connect the distinct characteristics and social realities of China's ancient and contemporary eras to inspire students to reflect on educational systems. This helps students rationally grasp the traits of domestic and foreign institutional cultures, understand the development, strengths, and weaknesses of China's college entrance examination system, recognize the diversity of the world, and develop a dialectical and objective cultural attitude.

Teachers also need to design a variety of practical activities involving cultural experience and exploration, providing students with opportunities to describe, compare, analyze, evaluate, and innovate regarding cultural phenomena. Through experiencing different cultural activities, students can engage with traditional Chinese excellent culture, savor its essence and connotations, understand cultural differences, build cultural confidence,

and develop a tolerant attitude toward foreign cultures.

4.4. Innovate tasks to enhance the dissemination power of Chinese culture

The dissemination of Chinese culture by foreign language learners is based on cultural confidence, which requires rich and positive cultural experiences as well as the enhancement of cultural dissemination capabilities. Teachers need to innovate cultural learning tasks, connect them with real life, and realize them through various practical activities. For example, when learning Unit 15 “William Shakespeare: His Life and Works” in Book 3, exploratory project-based learning tasks can be designed to guide students to explore the origins and characteristics of China’s five major opera genres or other local opera forms in combination with their own regions. Based on this, teachers can design project-based assignments: students are required to understand and record the value and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) such as the Sayram Lake Puppet Show in local areas through literature review and in-person interviews, translate the content into English, and present it in the form of promotional posters or videos.

When learning Unit 6 “Chinese Food” in Book 4, teachers can also ask students to experience local characteristic cuisines, conduct research, and narrate their origins and development in English, they can create knowledge structure diagrams, write promotional articles, or record introduction videos in English modeled after the documentary such as *A Bite of China*.

4.5. Emphasize assessment and focus on the learning effects of Chinese culture

The integration of Chinese culture content aims to enhance students’ cultural confidence and the international dissemination power of Chinese culture. Therefore, the learning effects of Chinese culture can be evaluated through the explicit manifestations of learning outcomes. In this regard, Zhang Yuhong suggests assessing students’ ability to “tell Chinese stories well in English” to examine their English application skills, Chinese cultural literacy, and intercultural communication competence^[9]. For performance assessment, teachers can try to implement it with reference to the learning-oriented performance assessment quality analysis framework proposed by Zhou Wenye et al., designing assessments from three aspects: performance objectives, assessment tasks, and assessment criteria^[10]. For instance, in Unit 10 “The Life Story of an Ancient Chinese Poet” in Book 2, students need to recommend a Chinese writer through literature research and reading, and be assessed based on their task presentation. Corresponding objectives should be set for the literature research process, reading process, and final presentation of results.

5. Conclusion

Cultural teaching is not only about imparting cultural knowledge, but more importantly, about guiding beliefs and setting examples through actions. As the saying goes, “If a leader is upright, his words will be followed without command; if he is not upright, his commands will not be obeyed even if enforced”. Therefore, as a link for the transmission of traditional Chinese culture, teachers have the most direct influence on students. Teachers must attach importance to learning traditional Chinese culture, accumulate richer linguistic expressions for Chinese cultural concepts, update their knowledge by reading foreign publicity books and periodicals, watch audio-visual materials on Chinese culture, take online courses, and learn to think and apply this knowledge in practice.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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