

Exploration on the Integration of Traditional Chinese Culture into College English in the Context of New Liberal Arts

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Abstract: The "New Liberal Arts" education and related policies, such as ideological education within courses, require college English courses to proactively adapt. While emphasizing the utilitarian nature of English, it is even more important to fully leverage its humanistic and general education qualities. Efforts should be focused on enhancing students' awareness of learning English and spreading Chinese culture through English and their specialized skills, with an emphasis on bolstering confidence in our national culture. Furthermore, it is essential to naturally integrate the goal of cultivating international talents in the context of the New Liberal Arts into everyday teaching, exploring language teaching that centers around students. The traditional Chinese culture, with its long history and national spirit, not only benefits the humanistic quality of college students but also contributes to their cultural confidence. This is to enhance their international communication capabilities, better conveying China's voice and telling China's stories.

1. Introduction

In the conference on the construction of the New Liberal Arts held by the Ministry of Education in November 2020, it was pointed out that liberal arts education is the "main battlefield, main front, and main channel to foster confidence, pride, and independence; to generate influence, appeal, and shaping power; and to form national and ethnic cultural awareness." The "Manifesto of the New Liberal Arts Construction" emphasized that in the new era, improving comprehensive national strength requires the accelerated innovative development of liberal arts education. Firm cultural confidence and cultivating the new generation both necessitate the New Liberal Arts.

As China's interactions with other countries in various fields increase, the demand for international talents across all industries continues to grow. This has led to a consistent increase in the learning and application needs of English among non-English major university students. "College English," as one of the essential humanities courses, covers a broad audience and lasts over an extended period. It needs to respond to the changes of the times and actively adapt. While emphasizing the utilitarian nature of English, it's even more crucial to fully leverage its humanistic and general education qualities. The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation cannot be separated from cultural confidence as a vital spiritual force. Understanding the Chinese story is the beginning of establishing students' confidence in national culture. Telling the Chinese story well establishes the students' awareness of spreading China's voice. Narrating the Chinese story well in a foreign language guides students to join the international communication of Chinese culture, thereby cultivating "world-class liberal arts talents with Chinese characteristics" in this new era. The traditional Chinese culture, nurtured by a long history, embodies rich moral thought and spiritual wealth. Aside from offering students valuable nourishment and helping them establish a correct and healthy life philosophy, value system, and worldview, it strengthens their identification with their own culture and boosts their confidence in national culture. Moreover, it allows the world to understand and recognize China in a more comprehensive and multi-dimensional manner[1-2].

2. The Current State of Integrating Traditional Chinese Culture into College English Courses

2.1 Absence of Traditional Chinese Culture in Teaching Materials

In course instruction, teaching materials serve as the medium and play a crucial role. Traditional language teaching concepts have led to college English materials that predominantly focus on themes from the Western world. Most are aimed at presenting Western cultural cultivation and English thinking, thus neglecting the presentation of traditional Chinese culture. Over time, English and American cultures have taken the dominant position in English teaching, resulting in a "loss of voice" for Chinese culture[3].

Although policies related to "New Liberal Arts" education and curriculum ideology have triggered some reforms in college English textbooks, the majority of the content merely switches languages to introduce traditional Chinese culture. Students typically engage with this content primarily for reading or translation skill training. Thus, they tend to focus more on language points and grammar, rather than the cultural aspects themselves. Due to the absence of Chinese traditional culture in listening and speaking exercises, students lack adequate opportunities to practice. It remains challenging for them to find their cultural identity amidst prevalent English and American cultures during language learning. Moreover, if translations of Chinese traditional culture are done only by native English speakers without a proper cultural background, it results in a lack of depth and essence, hindering students' deep understanding of Chinese traditional culture[4].

Additionally, traditional teaching and learning concepts, deeply influenced by exam-oriented education, have emphasized English's utilitarian nature. The focus is predominantly on listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating skills. This overlooks English's humanistic and general education qualities and neglects to train students in cross-cultural communication skills in real-life situations, further sidelining the integration of traditional Chinese culture[5].

2.2 Insufficient Humanistic Qualities and Ideological Awareness of Teachers in the Teaching Process

In course instruction, teachers play an essential guiding role. To a large extent, most students' learning directions will follow the teacher's lead. At present, influenced by their educational backgrounds or traditional English teaching concepts, the majority of college English teachers lack adequate understanding and depth in disseminating traditional Chinese culture. Striving to create a so-called good language environment, they might overemphasize and interpret Western culture, neglecting to balance the teaching ratios of Eastern and Western cultures. Additionally, a utilitarian approach to teaching could be a reason for teachers' excessive focus on language structure and correct grammar usage. Those who consciously incorporate ideological content might blend political ideology with the course, making the integration seem forced and unnatural[6].

2.3 Students' Lack of Enthusiasm in Cultivating and Disseminating Traditional Chinese Culture during the Teaching Process

In course instruction, students are the primary entities. However, in college English courses, most students are unable to accurately, clearly, and fluently narrate traditional Chinese culture in English. Under various stages of traditional English teaching models, students are primarily fed English grammar and Western culture, gradually losing their initiative and enthusiasm to understand and propagate traditional Chinese culture in English. Constant immersion in Western culture and a lack of exposure to China's rich cultural heritage can blur their cultural identity. Furthermore, the rise of globalization and information technology offers students various ways to access information, making them more susceptible to Western cultural influences. The convenience of the internet can make students seek shortcuts in their learning journey, making it even harder for them to delve deep into understanding and inheriting traditional Chinese culture, let alone promoting and disseminating it[7-8].

3. Strategies for Integrating Chinese Traditional Culture into University English Curriculum

3.1 University English teaching materials need to be restructured to excavate the Chinese traditional cultural system

To position students at the forefront of ever-intensifying international exchanges, the content of university English curriculum materials should emphasize not only language proficiency and pragmatic competence but also cross-cultural communication skills. Textbook content shouldn't blindly adopt materials from English-speaking countries or simply follow foreign curriculum design. Instead, it should be founded on socialist core values, aiming to reshape a curriculum that aligns with the times while preserving Chinese characteristics. This ensures that students maintain proper ideological and value orientations throughout their English studies, preventing them from becoming overly enamored with Western cultures and losing touch with their cultural roots[9].

The content should be diversified, incorporating Chinese traditional culture organically rather than forcefully adding standalone traditional culture sections. After integrating English teaching materials, it's essential to intertwine traditional culture seamlessly, allowing students to make comparisons and actively understand, eventually enriching their appreciation of Chinese culture. For example, when discussing dates and times, teaching materials could incorporate the Chinese 24 solar terms. Instead of just teaching the English translations and corresponding customs, delve deeper into their origins, calculations, and significance. Similarly, when discussing Western coffee culture, one can introduce Chinese tea and wine cultures and encourage students to compare tea-drinking habits between countries like China and England or China and Japan. Presenting traditional culture shouldn't be a mere language switch; it should encompass historical backgrounds, developmental contexts, and contemporary significance, fostering genuine interest among students.

In terms of format, with the advancement of the internet, materials should be digitalized and integrate both online and offline modes. Combining text, images, and audio, the richness of Chinese culture can be showcased in varied forms, enhancing students' enthusiasm. Furthermore, traditional Chinese cultural content shouldn't be limited to reading exercises alone. Students should be exposed to listening, speaking, writing, and translating exercises related to Chinese culture, ensuring comprehensive skill development. For instance, if reading materials discuss the Spring Festival, translation exercises could guide students to describe the Mid-Autumn Festival similarly. This approach prompts students to research the festival's origins and customs before translating, enhancing both their language and cultural proficiency.

However, integrating Chinese culture doesn't mean outright rejection of Western cultures. Balanced representation is crucial to help students appreciate cultural differences. Through this juxtaposition, students can hone their intercultural communication skills and cultural appreciation, allowing them to discuss Western cultures confidently and proudly introduce and spread the charm of Chinese culture to international peers.

3.2 University English teachers should proactively enhance their cultural literacy and political awareness

College English instructors not only convey language knowledge but also disseminate culture. While teaching the English language and Western culture, they must uphold socialist core values, committing themselves to moral education. Therefore, college English instructors must first adhere to correct values, maintain advanced political beliefs, and possess unwavering faith in socialism and communism with lofty ideals. Furthermore, they should embrace progressive educational philosophies, enhance their awareness of reform, and avoid merely transferring language knowledge and Western culture. As they improve their professional competence, they should also focus on enhancing their cultural literacy and political consciousness.

To enrich their knowledge of Chinese traditional culture and enhance cultural confidence, teachers should delve into the Chinese culture present in their teaching materials. Furthermore, they should pay attention to local cultural specialties (of both their hometowns and the location of their teaching institutions). When integrating traditional culture into teaching, this localized culture, due to its geographical relevance, can be more relatable and immersive for both students and teachers.

For example, the Sichuan-Chongqing region boasts the distinctive Bayu culture and the longstanding Shu culture centered around the Chengdu plain. Guangzhou inherits the Chaoshan culture rooted in ancient Central China and the Cantonese culture derived from Central and South China migrants. Yunnan is home to the Dongba culture with the world's only surviving pictographic script, drawing global attention. Qinghai features the Tibetan Thangka art, which paints a vivid picture of the sacred Buddhist world. Jiangxi is renowned for Jingdezhen porcelain, globally recognized for its exquisite craftsmanship and vibrant colors. There are also other vibrant cultures such as Hunan's Xiang culture, Hubei's Chu culture, Shandong's Qilu culture, Jilin's bark paintings, Xinjiang's painted pottery, Henan's dragon totem, and many more. All these vibrant Chinese cultures provide an endless source of cultural nourishment for English educators.

Moreover, university English instructors should tap into collective strength. Actively participating in conferences, training sessions, subject competitions related to the integration of traditional culture, engaging in teaching discussions within departments, and seeking external interdisciplinary exchanges is essential. They should also be attuned to "cross-disciplinary" opportunities, integrating knowledge and methods from other disciplines into English teaching. Collaborating with teachers from different subjects to discuss and analyze the best strategies for integrating Chinese culture into their lessons is pivotal.

In terms of instructional design, there should be an emphasis on innovation and reform. When integrating Chinese traditional culture into teaching, English instructors should anticipate students' needs, learning habits, and preferences, ensuring a gradual and organic progression. A blended teaching approach, leveraging online and offline methods, task-based teaching, and more, can be employed. This would allow students to familiarize themselves with cultural knowledge points through short videos or micro-lessons online, collaborate on projects, present findings in class, and engage in deeper discussions. To make learning more engaging, students could participate in activities like dubbing for short films, performing skits, and creating short videos, experiencing the joy of telling Chinese stories in English and promoting traditional Chinese culture.

3.3 University students should actively enhance their international communication skills

As the primary group in the educational process, students should actively participate in mastering a solid foundation in language. They should also actively engage in classroom teaching related to Chinese and foreign cultures and extracurricular activities. By absorbing and contemplating more, students can strengthen their critical thinking, comparative analysis, and judgment skills. They should discern and select from the myriad of information they encounter, deepen their understanding of Chinese traditional culture, ignite a sense of cultural identity, solidify their personal cultural competence, and strive to become the main force in communicating China's voice to the world as proficient narrators of Chinese stories.

University students should constantly remind themselves to "actively participate and keenly feel". Beyond passively receiving knowledge in the classroom and passively encountering information in their studies, they should proactively seek to understand the brilliant Chinese traditional culture. They can start from familiar territory, such as traditions related to their hometown festivals. Young students might be easily attracted by diverse foreign holidays like Valentine's Day and Christmas, but they're paying less attention to Chinese-specific festivals like the Lantern Festival and Chinese New Year. If they actively explore, they will surely find unique activities associated with these traditional Chinese festivals – like the lanterns and fireworks of the Lantern Festival, and the dumplings and glutinous rice balls of the Chinese New Year. These are cultural aspects that contemporary youth should learn and inherit. Additionally, by visiting cultural museums or traditional cultural exhibition halls in various places, students can gain a more direct appreciation of the essence of traditional culture through photographs, exhibit models, bilingual explanations, and hands-on activities. Lastly, beyond receiving ample information and cultural knowledge, students should actively seek opportunities to exercise and enhance their output capabilities. Competitions related to "Telling Chinese Stories in Foreign Languages", themed reading, writing, translation, speaking contests on "Understanding Contemporary China", and themed oral activities in English

clubs offer direct opportunities for students to articulate Chinese traditional culture in English.

In conclusion, besides language skills and cultural knowledge, when disseminating China's voice, students should also effectively leverage their expertise in specialized areas to aid their efforts. For instance, they can tell cultural stories through dance dramas, musicals, or themed paintings, and use short videos to broadcast traditional culture. Students should actively seek a vibrant cultural atmosphere, immerse themselves fully in understanding Chinese traditional culture, and use various methods to enhance cultural confidence and improve international communication capabilities.

4. The Practical Significance of Integrating Chinese Traditional Culture into College English Courses

Chinese traditional culture carries the lifeblood of the nation and its people. Every individual has the responsibility to safeguard the roots of the country and the soul of its ethnic groups. This culture needs to be passed down from generation to generation, and there's a need for its constant renewal and adaptation in line with the times, answering the call for its promotion and dissemination. General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasized that "telling China's stories well, spreading China's voice effectively, and presenting a true, multifaceted, and comprehensive image of China are crucial tasks in strengthening our nation's international communication capabilities." This provides a comprehensive, theoretically and practically grounded guideline for international communication in this new era. Incorporating Chinese traditional culture into college English courses, leveraging the advantages of linguistic disciplines, not only boosts students' enthusiasm for learning and cultivates their ability to narrate Chinese stories effectively and bolster cultural confidence, but also helps promote Chinese traditional culture globally, thereby enhancing China's international reputation and strengthening international exchanges with other countries.

5. Conclusion

The "Guideline for the Construction of Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Institutions" issued by the Ministry of Education emphasizes that "to fulfill the fundamental task of moral education and personal cultivation, it's essential to integrate value shaping, knowledge imparting, and skill training, and they should not be separated." The integration of Chinese traditional culture into college English courses requires joint changes and efforts from universities, publishers, English teachers, and students. This teaching reform aligns with the demands of contemporary developmental needs, reconnecting English teaching with Chinese culture. It ensures that linguistic disciplines better support students' majors and guides them, against an international backdrop, to enhance their identification with and confidence in their national culture, to develop international communication skills, and to emerge as well-rounded talents with a sense of national pride and social responsibility in the context of economic and informational globalization.

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