

Original Paper

A Study on the Pathways to Cultivating Chinese Cultural Awareness in College English Education

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Abstract

As global public discourse has undergone tremendous shifts in recent years, college English teaching is required to adopt the “value-oriented guidance” teaching framework to deliver multiple teaching effects simultaneously. Under this paradigm, college English teaching is not supposed to stop at the transmission of language knowledge. The ideological and political education should also be woven into the explanation of teaching content, and teachers are also encouraged to set up comparative reading tasks that bring Chinese and Western texts into dialogue, while productive activities should be designed so that students can express their own views in English. Digital materials can also serve as a way to extend and enrich what is learned in class. Against this background, this study builds on widely used college English textbooks and focuses on units that contain clear Chinese cultural elements as the main research object. The cultural and language content inside these units is also examined carefully, and a set of practical classroom teaching steps is then worked out on this basis. The proposed approach links everyday language-learning tasks with cultural understanding and expression, so students are able to improve their cross-cultural communication skills step by step in real situations. More importantly, it helps students develop a deeper understanding of and emotional attachment to Chinese culture. Through continuous language learning and opportunities to express Chinese culture in English, students can strengthen their sense of cultural recognition and eventually cultivate a stable and lasting cultural identity.

Keywords

College English Education, Teaching Practice, Awareness of Chinese Culture, Path Construction

1. Introduction

Culture serves as the core bond to unite all citizens and build national pride. Promoting cultural

development also acts as an essential method for China to gain advantages in global ideological competition and lift national cultural soft power. Among all general undergraduate courses, College English Education covers the largest number of students and lasts the longest learning cycle, which makes it the most suitable core platform to systematically cultivate college students' awareness of Chinese culture. However, current college English teaching still falls into an obvious predicament: students can communicate smoothly in English about Western literary masterpieces, educational thoughts and ethical concepts during class time, but fail to introduce traditional Chinese philosophy, classic cultural customs, as well as core values and governance concepts of contemporary China to overseas audiences in fluent English. Faced with this problem, the higher education sector must resolve an urgent task: transform college students from passive recipients of Western culture into active communicators who spread Chinese cultural stories to the whole world. Beginning with the necessity of integrating Chinese cultural awareness into college English education, this study aligns with the Chinese cultural themes embedded in the authoritative college English textbook series *New Horizon College English (4th Edition)*. Guided by the four-part teaching logic of "value-oriented guidance, Sino-Western textual dialogue, task-driven output and digital resource expansion", this study explores a feasible pathway to enhancing students' English proficiency and fostering their awareness of Chinese culture through the effective and innovative utilization of authoritative textbook resources.

2. Literature Review

The national strategy "Chinese Culture Going Global" and the wider need for communication between different civilizations have greatly changed the main purpose and teaching aims of College English Education. Scholars now are generally agree that Chinese cultural awareness should be included in college English teaching. Many researchers have studied this topic from different angles. The idea of "Chinese cultural aphasia" put forward by scholars caused deep discussions in the academic world (Cai, J. G., 2019). Later research papers have shown that it is necessary to help college students build cultural awareness in English teaching classrooms. This kind of cultural awareness creates a strong base for two-way cross-cultural communication ability (Byram, M., 1997). It is also a key part for China to carry out national cultural strategies and train students who are supposed to tell Chinese stories well to the world (Sun, Y. Z., 2016). In addition, adding cultural awareness training to college English courses will help the subject move away from training language skills only but emphasis on its humanistic educational value. It is also an important way to fulfill the core educational task of fostering virtue through education (Wen, Q. F., 2021).

In terms of teaching practice scholars have offered specific solutions for two main teaching problems. One problem is what Chinese cultural content should be taught in English classes. The other problem is how to teach culture in an effective way. The range of Chinese cultural teaching content in college English teaching has grown from traditional cultural highlights to modern national development achievements. These contents can be connected in logical ways with the theme of each textbook unit (Zhang, H. L.,

2020). To help students engage more deeply with cultural knowledge teachers may design comparative reading activities that include both Chinese and Western texts. Through looking at similarities and differences between the two cultural traditions, students are encouraged to build a full understanding of the special characteristics and values of Chinese civilization. Many teachers use the Production-Oriented Approach to create assignments that focus on cultural expression. Common examples include making short English videos about Chinese cultural elements and writing English essays that explain cultural symbols and their hidden meanings (Wen, Q. F., 2018). Beyond classroom-based output activities, teachers also ask students to do inquiry-based research on Chinese cultural topics and finish project-oriented learning tasks such as academic English papers and oral presentations. At the same time translation and interpretation training has become an important part of cultural teaching practice. Through regular practice in turning traditional Chinese texts and key cultural concepts into correct English expressions, students can slowly improve their ability to explain Chinese culture in a suitable way in intercultural situations. Earlier academic findings also remind teaching planners to keep a reasonable balance between Chinese cultural instruction and language skill training when they design the overall college English curriculum (Cong, C., 2000). In addition schools need to create a complete evaluation system for Chinese cultural expression in English. This assessment system should not only check if students can list cultural symbols. It should also test how well they understand the deeper cultural meanings behind these symbols (Yang, X. H. & Zhao, Y., 2023).

In terms of textbook construction, *New Horizon College English: Reading, Writing and Translation (4th Edition)* has clear strengths in developing college students' Awareness of Chinese Culture. Its special column "*Stories of China*" arranges three types of cultural content in an organized way. These are traditional Chinese culture, modern Chinese culture and revolutionary culture. Through carefully designed content and learning activities the textbook brings together language training and the development of cultural confidence in an effective way. When students work with these materials they can improve their intercultural communication competence and become better at expressing Chinese stories in English. At the same time the textbook encourages learners to compare cultures and appreciate the value of different civilizations. In this way it helps strengthen their cultural confidence through cross-cultural reflection and dialogue.

3. The Organic Integration of Chinese Cultural Contents into Textbooks

New Horizon College English Reading and Writing (4th Edition) is the chosen textbook for college English courses at the author's university. This textbook has two main features. First it gives systematic training for students' overall English abilities. These abilities include listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation. Second it places rich Chinese cultural content into each unit's theme and exercise. This content covers ancient classic ideas, national construction achievements in modern times and major Chinese value concepts. When students work with these learning materials they can improve their practical language skills. They can also build a deeper understanding of Chinese culture. The learning

process moves step by step from cultural cognition to understanding and then to expression. In this way it supports the balanced growth of English ability and Chinese cultural literacy. Each unit is built around a core Chinese cultural value such as integrity, innovation or inclusiveness. This value is then woven into the reading materials activities and assessment tasks. Each unit also includes two texts. Text A is usually the main carrier for bringing Chinese values into the unit and it helps guide and develop students' thinking ability. Text B is mostly made up of Western classic works or general topic texts. The two texts create a Chinese-Western dialogue structure. This structure strengthens the supporting evidence for the value-led spirit. It also expands the depth of reference for the Chinese-Western dialogue. In addition the specially designed section "*Stories of China*" includes fine traditional Chinese culture and modern achievements of China. This section provides rich materials for developing students' ability to tell Chinese stories well in English. Each unit also has many output-focused tasks. These tasks include translating political and cultural terms that are specific to Chinese culture. They also include oral storytelling activities and explaining Chinese viewpoints. These activities are designed to improve students' intercultural communication ability. At the same time they help strengthen students' connection with Chinese culture. Beyond the textbook resources the supporting U-campus smart teaching platform further expands the possibilities for cultural learning through digital technologies. The platform brings together different teaching functions such as digital courses intelligent assessment and voice evaluation. It gives teachers and students more learning resources. At the same time the platform provides access to original Chinese cultural classics and modern explanations from different historical periods. This allows college students to keep exploring, comparing and internalizing outstanding Chinese cultural resources through extended reading and cross-cultural thinking.

4. Pathways to Cultivating Chinese Cultural Awareness

This study adopts the four-dimensional teaching framework including value-oriented guidance, Sino-Western textual dialogue, task-driven output and digital resource expansion to carry out classroom practice. Unit 2 from Volume 3 of *New Horizon College English: Reading, Writing and Translation (4th Edition)* is chosen as the specific case, whole teaching plan, classroom activity arrangement, learning tasks and implementation steps are designed from the mentioned four dimensions. This case study is supposed to provide operable teaching references for college English teachers who want to integrate Chinese cultural awareness training into daily classes. The theme and content arrangement of this unit perfectly match the above four-part teaching framework. Text A *Zheng He, the Great Ancient Chinese Explorer* is a biographical article. It follows clear timeline to record Zheng He's voyages to the Western Seas, showing ancient China's outstanding maritime technology and precious cultural heritage left by ocean exchanges. The passage *Mei Lanfang — A Peking Opera Legend*, taken from in the "*Stories of China*" column, tells the life story of Peking Opera master Mei Lanfang. It introduces basic knowledge of Peking Opera, records Mei Lanfang's efforts to promote this traditional art form, and describes his patriotic acts of refusing to perform for Japanese invaders during the war.

4.1 Value-oriented Guidance

When teachers design teaching plan they first need to make clear the Chinese cultural theme of the whole unit. The core theme of this unit was set as peaceful exploration and communication among different civilizations during the lesson preparation stage. This task was made by combining the article content and the after-class practice. Before class students need to finish warm-up activities, text reading tasks and vocabulary exercises. Teachers need to check how well students complete these tasks through the U-Campus platform. This gives teachers a basic understanding of how students are behaving in their learning progress. The whole teaching process is then arranged into three connected stages. These stages are pre-reading activation, close textual analysis and value-oriented reflection. In all of these stages Zheng He's diplomatic idea of "prioritizing harmony" is linked with the modern concept of "the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road". This connection lets students explore how traditional Chinese values continue in modern intercultural exchange practices. The detailed classroom plan is shown below. At the pre-reading activation stage teachers will show students a world map. This map marks the sailing routes of Zheng He and Christopher Columbus. Then teachers will ask students to compare the two large ocean expeditions. Through this comparison students can see that Zheng He set sail 87 years earlier than Columbus. They can also observe that Zheng He's fleet was much larger in scale. After that teachers will raise a main discussion question. The question is why the earlier and more advanced ocean voyage in ancient China never turned into a colonial expansion. Students are then guided to look at the basic differences in cultural ideas and ways of thinking behind the two navigation activities. In the close textual analysis stage students focus on certain paragraphs of Text A. These paragraphs record Zheng He's diplomatic custom of giving gifts to overseas countries. With the teacher's help students will mark key words and summarize three main diplomatic actions of Zheng He's fleet. These actions include giving precious gifts, delivering imperial edicts and building friendly relations with local areas. Students are asked to find detailed evidence from the text. They also need to pull out traditional Chinese diplomatic thoughts from these historical events. These thoughts include valuing benevolence, keeping friendly neighbor relations and seeking world harmony. Through this process students will complete value condensation on their own.

4.2 Sino-Western Textual Dialogue

Following intensive reading and value extraction, teachers connect historical texts with current social topics, constructing a bridge between history and reality to realize value-oriented education. The Sino-Western textual dialogue teaching design mainly includes two parts: comparative reading of two texts about Zheng He and Columbus, and group cooperative analysis tasks. The two comparative reading materials are Text A in the textbook and excerpts from Columbus' voyage Journal. The reading focus covers the mission and operation modes of Zheng He's voyage, as well as Columbus' records written on October 12, 1492. These records clearly write down how Columbus plundered local resources, enslaved indigenous people and planned to occupy new land after arriving in America. Students work in groups to compare the two navigation activities from multiple perspectives including the time sequence of voyages,

fleet size, diplomatic methods, attitudes towards local residents and long-term historical influences. Each group needs to discuss two open-ended questions. The first question asks learners to look at the basic differences between the two navigation models. They do this by studying the relationship among travel goals, operational methods and historical results. The second question asks students to explain the different civilizational values behind these differences. They make this explanation by comparing China's traditional worldview of *Tianxia* with Western colonial thinking pattern. Through this comparative framework the classroom activities create a meaningful dialogue between two civilizations. Zheng He stands for the values linked with traditional Chinese culture while Columbus shows a different historical model of Western expansion. When students take part in cross-cultural comparison they will slowly gain a deeper understanding of the Chinese cultural idea of "harmony in diversity". They will also build a stronger sense of cultural confidence and identity.

During the whole teaching process instructors no longer work only as transmitters of text information. They act more as helpers who guide students in building meaningful dialogues between different cultural views. At the same time students also take an active role as participants in this dialogue. They develop comparative frameworks and explain historical materials by themselves. Also each group has to attach screenshots of original sources to their comparison reports. These reports need to be submitted through the U-Campus platform. This practice will help strengthen students' digital skills. It also makes their historical analysis more reliable and academic.

4.3 Task-Driven Output

The result of the task-driven output activity is an English short video called "*Introducing Zheng He to the World*". The video lasts about five minutes. Through the process of making the video students are expected to tell Chinese cultural stories in English better. They are also expected to slowly build a stronger sense of cultural identity by actively expressing culture. The first stage of video production is about building a clear narrative framework. Students use the textbook content to make a timeline of Zheng He's voyages. This helps them decide the timeline and structure of their storytelling. They will learn about the areas Zheng He visited and the major events during his journey, then pull out key historical information and set up the overall narrative framework. They also need to summarize three special features of Zheng He's voyages. These features are then turned into core messages that show the cultural values and characteristics of Chinese maritime civilization. The second stage focuses on writing the script. Students need to write an English video script of 300 to 500 words. The script has three parts including the introduction, the main body and the conclusion. The opening part gives basic information about the time, scale and range of Zheng He's voyage. It also needs to point out China's advanced sailing technology at that time. The main part needs to show the Chinese diplomatic approach of Zheng He from at least two levels. These levels should include peaceful diplomacy, cultural respect and mutual appreciation of civilizations. The ending part talks about the modern meaning of Zheng He's spirit. It especially links this spirit with the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. In this way it shows the historical continuity of Chinese maritime civilization and how it has changed in modern times.

Through this process students are encouraged to understand cultural heritage more deeply and feel stronger cultural confidence. To help students express themselves in English, teachers need to encourage learners to use the language materials given in the textbook and classroom resources. Useful sentence patterns like “*What set Zheng He apart was...*” and “*Unlike..., Zheng He...*” help students make comparative and explanatory stories. Key value words such as “*harmony*”, “*mutual respect*” and “*cultural exchange*” help them correctly express Chinese cultural ideas in English. Finally students need to record their videos at a speed close to natural speaking about 90 to 110 words per minute. They should try to have clear voices and sound both confident and calm. The voice-over must match the script and the pictures. After the recording is done, students need to upload the video to the U platform. They then use the platform’s smart voice evaluation tool to check their own video and make changes to improve it. The teacher then reviews the final video and gives back the evaluation results.

4.4 Digital Resource Expansion

In the four-dimensional teaching path we put forward, digital resources are used as auxiliary materials in every teaching stage. In the value-oriented guidance stage, digital resources offer teachers with background knowledge about the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, including its development history, current situation and future development directions. Teachers push special micro-courses about Zheng He’s Voyages to the Western seas to students through the platform. These micro-courses contain 3D dynamic sailing route maps and restored models of treasure ships, together with interactive electronic maps. With these materials, students will directly feel the time and space range of Zheng He’s voyages, forming an “embodied-cognitive” experience of ancient China’s ocean achievements. In the Sino-Western textual dialogue stage, students rely on AI learning tools to collect materials about Columbus’ voyages, then compare the two explorers’ different attitudes when contacting unfamiliar civilizations. When students finish writing scripts for video tasks, digital tools will provide intelligent writing evaluation services. The system gives instant feedback on grammar mistakes, word choice and article coherence, helping students revise and polish scripts independently. The oral evaluation engine marks students’ pronunciation errors in real time during dubbing recording and gives corresponding scores, effectively improving the quality of students’ oral output. In general, visualized digital learning materials help students gain intuitive “embodied-cognitive” experience of cultural knowledge. Search tools provide convenient channels for students to collect cultural information. Timely evaluation feedback on learning tasks guarantees students can finish high-quality assignments. All these digital resources work together will help to change students’ Chinese cultural awareness from static theoretical knowledge into practical abilities that can be displayed, expressed and evaluated in English.

5. Conclusion

Nowadays the global discourse pattern is undergoing profound changes. College English Education should break away from the old teaching mode that only focuses on improving students’ language skills and enhancing Western cultural learning. Instead, it should take cultivating students’ awareness of

Chinese Culture as one of the core teaching goals. Combining official designated textbooks and real classroom operation, this study constructs a practical teaching path to develop students' Chinese cultural awareness from the dimensions of value-oriented guidance, Sino-Western textual dialogue, task-driven output and digital resource expansion. The results show that embedding digital resources including the U-Campus platform, AI search tools and intelligent evaluation systems into every teaching stage can provide visualized support for students to understand Chinese culture. Under the guidance of value-themed teaching, teachers carry out pre-reading activation, close textual analysis and value-oriented reflection. Students will fully grasp the traditional Chinese values hidden in historical stories. Besides, comparative reading of Chinese and Western texts pushes students to explore the internal logic of Chinese civilization under cultural differences, which strengthens their cultural identity and national recognition. Cultural output tasks also let students form clear cultural self-perception by telling authentic Chinese stories in English. Even so, there are still many obvious difficulties in cultivating cultural awareness in college English courses. Future research needs to further discuss two key problems: how to find a reasonable balance between cultural teaching and language training objectives, and how to make cultural education fully cover the profound essence of fine traditional Chinese values and unique Chinese thinking modes.

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