

Original Paper

A Case Study of English Literature Teaching Reform for Dual-Cultural Stance and Local Humanistic Thinking

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Received: July 19, 2026

Accepted: August 02, 2026

Online Published: August 20, 2026

doi:10.22158/wjer.v13n4p26

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/wjer.v13n4p26>

Abstract

*This case study aims to ask whether inquiry-based reading reports can cultivate English majors' critical thinking that is simultaneously responsive to the Western literary traditions and anchored in the local Chinese cultural sensibilities. Drawing on qualitative data comprised of classroom recordings, student-generated questions, written reading reports, questionnaires, and follow-up interviews, this study traces how third-year Business English students engaged with D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* through a sequence of self-questioning, group deliberation, and evidence-based debate. The findings show that when given freedom to pose their own interpretive questions, students spontaneously invoked their native cultural frameworks, generating not neat parallels but productive dissonance that compelled them to revisit textual evidence and revise their earlier readings. The lesson also heightened their metacognitive awareness as they reported greater sensitivity to divergent perspectives and the weight of textual proof. The reform thus implies that literary teaching need not sacrifice local identity for global engagement, but when structured around authentic inquiry, it can foster readers who navigate cultural difference with critical alertness and reflective openness.*

Keywords

case study, inquiry-based reading reports, literary reading, Sons and Lovers, dual-cultural stance, local humanistic thinking

1. Introduction

1.1 Critical Thinking Cultivation through Deep Literary Reading

English literary works are distinguished by expressive nuance, rhetorical devices, and layered semantics; they compress much meaning into few words and use language more densely than other genres. Literature is saturated between the lines with undertones and implications beyond the literal,

and it frequently stretches language past its conventional bounds. Reading literature refines sensitivity to expressive strategies and deepens one's grasp of unusual idiomatic usage (Cheng & Zhao, 2022). Beyond cultivating temperament and moral sensibilities, it is a vital route for enhancing college students' linguistic competence, overall English proficiency, and cultural cultivation.

In China, the number of English learners is staggering, roughly a third of the population, but only a very small proportion achieves genuine mastery, and those able to shoulder nationally significant responsibilities are even scarcer. People who manage everyday conversation are everywhere, but high-calibre English talents remain scarce (Jiang, 2020). This worrying "talent paradox" cannot be blamed simply on learners' lack of effort; it stems from our English education's long neglect of systematic reading of English literary works and deliberate cultivation of critical thinking from a perspective that includes both Chinese and Western traditions. This pedagogical inertia, the habit of avoiding serious reading and deep reflection, produces graduates who are linguistically fluent but intellectually thin, while genuinely capable high-end English professionals remain rare (Cai, 2020).

The neglect of English literary reading severs the link between language learning and culture. When English is reduced to decontextualised communicative signs and exam skills, students may memorize countless words and sentence patterns but never encounter the complexities of human nature in Shakespeare's metaphors, trace British society in Dickens's narratives, or feel the inner rhythm of English in Woolf's stream of consciousness. Such English is sterile; learners can order food, ask directions, or send emails, but cannot carry deep thought, delicate emotion, or nuanced value judgement. The true essence of language is not in phrasebook dialogues but in the ways great writers stretch, reshape, and reinvent language. To abandon literary reading is to renounce the highest form of language. Learners stay trapped at the shallow end of "comprehensible input", unable to internalise English patterns of thought and aesthetic logic, and so never acquire the capacity for sustained narrative or cultural interpretation in English.

What's worse, this detachment from literature causes critical thinking to wither, especially from a dual Chinese-Western perspective (Wang, 2018). English literature is not insular; it carries the spiritual trajectory of the West from the Renaissance to modernism, embodying traditions of rational enquiry, individual consciousness, critical reflection, and historical reckoning. Without systematic engagement with these texts, learners can hardly access the core codes of Western culture; they can only translate Western phenomena through native conceptual frameworks and never engage in comparison, cross-referencing, and mutual illumination. The critical thinking we call "dual-cultural" is not a simple comparison of knowledge; rather, it emerges after deep reading of Western literature, when one can draw on one's own Chinese cultural heritage as a reference and thereby pose questions and critical examinations of equal weight.

1.2 Deficiencies in the Teaching of Literature Reading

Literature reading courses for English majors in Chinese universities are often nominal rather than substantive. The most glaring problem is that literary reading has been reduced to an appendage of

language skill training. In class, classic literary works are broken down into isolated vocabulary lists and grammar examples. Teachers translate sentence by sentence and explain new words while students take notes for exams. As a result, they never really enter the narrative world or emotional core of the works. A novel's tension, poetry's cadence, and drama's conflicts dissolve under a word-for-word intensive reading approach, so the literature class becomes another intensive reading session and the essence of language is reduced into barren symbols (Lü, 2018).

Additionally, the amount of reading is also severely limited. Most college students rely on excerpts, simplified versions, or literary history textbooks, and even rarely finish one complete original novel in a semester. Without the immersive experience of an entire book, they fail to appreciate the writer's overall command of language and detect the deeper semantic network woven by foreshadowing, irony, and metaphor, and thus they cannot acquire a coherent grasp of the English literary tradition. As a result, they develop neither language proficiency in any real sense nor the habit of analytical reading and critical thinking based on textual scrutiny. They gain only fragmentary literary knowledge and ready-made interpretations, and find it difficult to raise thoughtful questions and generate reflective insights through cross-cultural comparison between Chinese and Western civilizations. This is precisely the crux that hinders the cultivation of high-level English talents. More fundamentally, estrangement from literary reading leads to the withering of critical thinking from a dual-cultural perspective; learners remain stuck at the shallow level of comprehensible input, unable to grasp English patterns of thought and aesthetic logic or to generate in-depth questioning and reflection in the light of both Chinese and Western traditions, which is the root cause of the shortage of truly capable English professionals.

1.3 English Literature Reform for Dual-Cultural Stance

The reform should develop a pedagogy with Chinese characteristics, with the aim of producing critical thinkers with both global outlook and local humanistic concerns (Zhang, 2018). Given that traditional teaching often substitutes the teacher's authoritative interpretation for students' independent thought, reform should restore reading initiative, encourage identifying problems and raising questions, and shift from memorizing conclusions to exploring processes. The class must become student-centered inquiry (Meng, 2018), because only genuine readers can activate curiosity, critical awareness, and evidential reasoning, giving critical thinking a solid footing.

Yet restoring the students' initiative is only a first step; the deeper difficulty lies in the interpretive frameworks students have been taught to rely on. Literature teaching has been constrained by Western critical frameworks, with students mechanically applying imported theories while neglecting local perspectives. So reform should direct students toward Chinese cultural traditions, ethical values, and aesthetic sensibilities. While engaging with Western civilization, students are required to compare, question, and engage in cross-cultural dialogues. This bidirectional practice helps them grasp the spiritual core of Western literature and enables self-reflection, fostering cultural subjectivity (Jin, 2019) and freeing them from over-reliance on Western theoretical discourse. This bidirectional approach is

also supposed to build a mutually interpretive reading path reconciling global vision with local concern (Guo, 2018).

Moreover, literature teaching should not settle for impressionistic comments or empty theoretical speculation. It must insist on close textual engagement, guiding students to reason logically and argue substantively from linguistic details, thus developing rational inquiry. Close reading and evidential reasoning require rigorous intellectual discipline, ensuring analytical skills and judgement remain grounded.

Last but not least, the teacher's role should shift from a knowledge dispenser to a thinking facilitator. Rather than offering definitive answers, the teacher creates open-ended questions, fosters deep dialogue, and helps students revise their views through intellectual exchange. This role transformation is essential for developing thinking. In essence, the reform is less about producing followers of Western culture than about nurturing talents rooted locally yet open to the West. It counters the long neglect of the humanities and reorients English studies from a local perspective, returning the focus to cultural understanding and critical thinking while preserving cultural identity. Cross-cultural comparison forges independent, grounded, and broad-minded judgment. Ultimately, this enables Chinese academia to claim its own space in global dialogue (Yuan, 2018).

2. Introduction to the Case Study: Teaching *Sons and Lovers* through Inquiry-based Reading Reports

2.1 Text Selection

The reading material for this lesson is *Sons and Lovers*, a representative novel by D. H. Lawrence. Set in a mining community during the Industrial Revolution, the novel follows the Morel family. The miner Walter Morel is rough and taciturn, while his wife Gertrude, from a middle-class background, is intellectually and emotionally refined. Their marriage remains persistently strained. Gertrude invests all her emotional energy in her eldest son William. When William dies, she redirects her intense possessiveness toward her younger son Paul, only to create a morbidly symbiotic relationship. She constantly interferes in Paul's love life, viewing the spiritually inclined Miriam as a rival and driving a wedge between them. Paul also has a passionate affair with Clara, an independent factory worker, but this relationship offers only physical comfort; he remains unable to break free from his mother's psychological grip. Both relationships collapse, ultimately due to Paul's mother's emotional manipulation. The novel also includes episodes about the father's drinking and the harshness of mining work, which serve as symbols of industrial alienation. After his mother's death, Paul finally sheds his psychological chains, refuses to give in, and sets out alone to find his own path.

This novel draws on the Oedipal motif to expose how industrial civilization distorts family ethics and human emotions. It allows students to grasp the spiritual crisis of modern British society, and thus move beyond uncritical admiration of Western literature and adopt a more balanced, critical perspective on Western modernity. Moreover, the mother's excessive control over Paul's relationships and her

transfer of life expectations to him resonate with common issues in Chinese families, such as emotional entanglement between parents and children, blurred generational boundaries, and parental interference in young adults' romantic choices. By holding up this Western text as a mirror, students are encouraged to reflect on Chinese parent-child relationships, thereby moving beyond superficial appreciation of foreign fiction. In this way, the lesson not only aims to sharpen their critical thinking but also encourages students to become humanistic thinkers with both global awareness and local concern.

2.2 Teaching Activities

The lesson revolves around inquiry-based reading report tasks. The class consists of junior Business English majors at Xianda College, Shanghai International Studies University. Their English proficiency is above average, with a TEM-4 (Test for English Majors Band 4) pass rate of 64 percent, notably higher than the national average, which suggests solid foundational skills and good overall competence. They had previously taken courses like British and American literary history, a general survey of English-speaking countries, and grammar and writing in their first and second years on campus.

The lesson requires students to read the original text carefully, write critical analyses, and engage in cross-cultural thinking through reading and writing, so that while they interpret Western works they also keep local issues in mind. Thus this teaching mode transforms language ability into humanistic reflection and aligns well with the objectives for senior English majors (Wen & Sun, 2021).

To help students better understand *Sons and Lovers* and cultivate deep reading, the teacher did not set specific questions or keywords. Instead, students read the novel and each raised one question. The teacher then collected and categorized these questions according to their dimensions and frequency, compiled a list, and then distributed it to the class. Students were then assigned a second reading of the novel and asked to write a reading report. The specific requirements were as follows:

- (1) Briefly summarize the main plot of the novel.
- (2) Select one question from the list that you find most interesting or meaningful, and justify your choice.
- (3) Respond to the question you have chosen.

1.1 Instructional Procedure

Task 1: Summarize the main plots of the novel.

Plot 1: Mrs. Morel's Possessive Love	
Plot 2: William's Death, Paul's New Role	
Plot 3: Paul and Miriam's Tortured Bond	
Plot 4: Passionate Affair with Clara Dawes	
Plot 5: The Euthanasia of Mrs. Morel	
Plot 6: Towards the City: Paul's Rebirth	

Task 2: Choose NO MORE THAN THREE best questions and explain your reasons.

Best Questions	Reasons

Task 3: Choose ONE question, share your ideas and write down what you all agree on.

Question	Answers	Evidence/ Examples

Task 4: Peer review your reading report. Record what you did well and what can be improved.

Advantages	Suggestions

Figure 1. Worksheet (*Sons and Lovers*)

Table 1. Teaching Procedure for *Sons and Lovers*

Activities	time	Specific Tasks
1 Plot Summary	15min	Brief summary of each plot point.
2 Question Sharing	20min	Selection of the best question with justification.
3 Question Discussion	25min	Sharing answers with textual evidence and developing thematic understanding through discussion.
4 Peer Review	20min	Peer review of reading reports, identifying strengths and areas for improvement.

The four activities shown in Table 1 serve different functions. “Plot Summary” is essential given the novel’s length, roughly 160,000 words across nearly 500 pages, so students need this activity to get a clear sense of the whole story. Discussing the best questions and why they were chosen as the best helps students recognize where comprehension difficulties lie, and a range of critical angles from those questions help students see that multiple interpretations are possible. Debating frequently asked questions with supporting evidence from the novel makes it easier to grasp the author’s purpose and the novel’s thematic concerns. Peer review, in turn, pushes students to assess others’ reports while also re-examining their own, which can sharpen their awareness of the criteria for effective writing, their own weaknesses, and the directions for future growth.

2.3 Research Method

The lesson-study researcher paired data collection with qualitative analysis to examine how the lesson helped third-year Business English majors in Xianda International Exchange College, Shanghai International Studies University develop critical thinking that spans global perspectives and local concerns. Table 2 shows the main data, including videos of routine classes, the instructional design and recording of the focal lesson, student work, interviews, and questionnaires.

Table 2. Data Collected

Instructional Phases	Data Sources
Pre-instruction	Video recordings of routine classes, Student reading reports, Student interviews
During-instruction	video recording of the lesson, Student work (question lists, reading reports, and learning guides)
Post-instruction	Student questionnaire surveys

Before the lesson, the researcher collected video recordings of the teacher's regular classes and the novel reading reports students had written earlier. As the lesson unfolded, the researcher recorded the entire teaching process and collected all student-produced materials including question lists, reading reports, learning guides, and in-class oral contributions. Once the lesson ended, the teacher wrote a reflective journal, and the researcher administered a questionnaire survey and follow-up interviews with the students.

3. Lesson Study Results and Discussion: Students' Development of Intercultural Humanistic Critical Thinking

Analysis of the data reveals that the lesson effectively prompted students' intercultural thinking and advanced their humanistic critical thinking in the dimensions of novel comprehension, ways of thinking, and reading methods.

(1) Novel Comprehension

The data point to critical engagement with the novel in the *Sons and Lovers* lesson, which was taught through reading report activities. Across the "reading-questioning-responding-sharing-commenting" cycle, students actively reasoned through each phase, and this improved both the efficiency and quality of their comprehension and discussion.

To begin with, students were able to raise thought-provoking questions after reading. These questions touched upon characters, plot, metaphorical meaning, and theme (Table 3). They reveal where students were puzzled and what intrigued them: most doubted whether key plot developments were plausible or realistic, felt unsure about the author's intentions, and wanted to probe the characters and their

real-world significance. The act of posing such questions was itself a way of stepping back and evaluating their own reading.

Table 3. Examples of Student Reading Questions on the Reading

Dimensions of Novel	Examples
Comprehension	● In what ways does Mrs. Morel's disapproval of Miriam shape Paul's decision to break off their relationship? ● How do Miriam and Clara embody different, even opposing desires in Paul's life?
Characters	● What role does Clara play in this novel? ● In Chinese culture, a mother's sacrifice for her son's education and future is often seen as a deep expression of love, so how does Mrs. Morel's ambition for Paul reflect a similar dynamic, and in what ways does her devotion both empower him and limit his emotional independence?
Plot	● How does William's sudden death transform the Morel household and redirect Mrs. Morel's emotional investment toward Paul? ● Why does Paul's relationship with Miriam fail to develop into a physical union, and how does this failure lead to their final separation? ● What events lead to the beginning of Paul's passionate affair with Clara, and why does Clara ultimately decide to return to her husband? ● In the novel's closing scene, what inner struggle does Paul face in the darkness, and what does his decision to walk toward the town's lights suggest about his future? ● How might Paul's emotional dependence over his mother be interpreted through the lens of Chinese filial piety (孝)?
Metaphorical Meaning	● What does the coal mine symbolize in the novel, and how does it shape the emotional distance between Walter Morel and the rest of the family? ● How do the flower images associated with Miriam function as metaphors for Paul's perception of her and the spiritual nature of their bond? ● What is the metaphorical significance of the motif of swinging in the novel, and how does it reflect Paul's wavering between emotional attachments? ● How does the reconciliation between Clara and Baxter Dawes function as a metaphor that resonates with the Chinese saying “破镜重圆” (a broken mirror made whole), and what does this suggest about the possibility of emotional repair in the novel?

Themes	●How does the novel present the conflict between spiritual and physical love through Paul's relationships with Miriam and Clara?
	●How does the Oedipal bond between Paul and Mrs. Morel function as a major theme that shapes his inability to commit to other women?
	●What role does class consciousness play as a theme in the tension between Paul and Miriam, and how does it influence their failed relationship?
	●In what ways does the theme of industrial versus natural life emerge through the contrast between the mining world and the countryside?

What is more, as students responded in writing through the reading reports and orally in the sharing and discussion that followed, they approached the questions with open-mindedness, engaged in reasoned inquiry, and showed a concern for getting at the truth. This in turn helped the whole class reach a deeper understanding of the novel (Table 4).

Table 4. Student Responses to High-Frequency Questions (Reading Reports and In-Class Oral Contributions)

Questions	Answers	Evidence from the Novel
In what ways does Mrs. Morel's disapproval of and emotional dependence pushed Miriam shape Paul's decision to break off their relationship?	Mrs. Morel's constant criticism made Paul see Miriam as too spiritual and draining, so his guilt and emotional dependence pushed him to end the relationship.	1) Mrs. Morel warns that Miriam will "suck a man's soul out". 2) She complains Paul returns "as dull as a door-nail" after seeing Miriam. 3) Paul finally tells Miriam she wants only a "soul union," not a whole woman, echoing his mother's words.
What events lead to the beginning of Paul's passionate affair with Clara, and why does Clara ultimately decide to return to her husband?	After Paul left Miriam, he turned to Clara for physical passion. She returned to her husband when he fell seriously ill.	1) After breaking with Miriam, Paul visits Clara and they kiss passionately. 2) Clara admits her place is with her husband, not Paul.
How might Paul's emotional dependence over his mother be interpreted through the	In Chinese culture, filial piety means respecting and caring for parents. However, Paul's emotional dependence goes too far. His devotion turns into a soul-binding tie that traps him. He feels extreme guilt	

lens of Chinese filial piety (孝)?	whenever he tries to love another woman, as if doing so betrays his mother. Ultimately, this distorted form of filial piety prevents him from building his own independent life and healthy adult relationships.
In the novel's closing scene, what inner struggle does Paul face in the darkness, and what does his decision to walk toward the town's lights suggest about his future?	Paul struggles between giving in to death and choosing life. Walking toward the town lights means he decides to live and face an uncertain future. 1) He feels the darkness trying to pull him down but resists. 2) He turns and walks "towards the faintly humming, glowing town, quickly." 3) This final act shows he rejects self-destruction and embraces life.
How does the Oedipal bond between Paul and Mrs. Morel function as a major theme that shapes his inability to commit to other women?	Emotionally tied to his mother, Paul views other women as rivals and can never fully commit. 1) He tells Miriam his mother is the only woman he could ever love. 2) He admits to Clara that he belongs to his mother and cannot marry. 3) After his mother dies, Paul feels utterly lost, and this reflects his total dependence.

More concrete details from the discussion are presented as follows:

●What ways does Mrs. Morel's disapproval of Miriam shape Paul's decision to break off their relationship?

The question pinpoints the novel's difficulty: students saw how maternal emotional manipulation unravels Paul's love to deepen their grasp of the Oedipal complex and the characters' psychological complexity, which brought a heated discussion.

S1: I think Mrs. Morel's disapproval is the main reason Paul ends things. Paul depends on his mother too much. She pours herself into him, and he lives for her approval. When she says Miriam will "suck a man's soul out", she shapes how Paul sees Miriam, and he believes it. He uses her exact words with Miriam. He can't separate her voice from his own thoughts.

S2: I think Mrs. Morel has a strong influence, but not the decisive factor. Paul's mixed feelings about Miriam are real and begin before his mother interferes. He feels suffocated by her spiritual love, thinking she wants "his soul, not him". Mrs. Morel gives him words for that, but doesn't create it. Paul is torn; he keeps going back to Miriam despite her disapproval. Otherwise, he'd have broken up much

earlier. The breakup comes from his own inner conflict, which his mother uses but doesn't cause.

S3: I'd add another angle. Mrs. Morel's disapproval works less like advice and more like emotional pressure. The novel says Paul hates Miriam easily because she causes his mother suffering. His loyalty is so strong that Miriam's presence feels like betrayal. Paul can't bear that guilt. So when he breaks up with Miriam, he's not choosing between two women; he's choosing to stop hurting his mother. Paul was never truly free to choose Miriam.

From this exchange, we can see that students clearly approached the question from different angles. Student 1 centers on "discursive internalization". She catches the direct echo between Paul's "soul union" and his mother's earlier words, arguing that Mrs. Morel's worldview has effectively overwritten Paul's self-consciousness. This reading stays close to the verbal evidence, linking the pathological mother-son symbiosis to the linguistic act of the breakup while its limitation is a one-sided determinism that may underplay the independence of Paul's own affective conflicts. Student 2, by contrast, draws attention to those very conflicts. He notes that Paul repeatedly returns to Miriam, so if maternal disapproval were the only cause, the breakup would have come much earlier. He thus separates the origin of Paul's unease (his own) from the words by his mother. This refutational move reflects dialectical thinking and reminds us that literary characters do not simply carry out external commands. Student 3 pushes the discussion toward deeper emotional dynamics as he treats "guilt" as a mediating variable, considering that the mother's disapproval functions less as a command than as emotional pressure, so Paul's breakup is not really a choice between two women but an attempt to stop hurting his mother. This understanding is highly compelling because it pulls the mother-son bond, the romantic relation, and Paul's self-identity into a closed psychological loop. Taken together, these three interpretations are not mutually exclusive; they uncover the layered psychological complexity in Lawrence's characters.

- How might Paul's emotional dependence over his mother be interpreted through the lens of Chinese filial piety?

In this lesson, the teacher raised this question to help students interpret a key plot from a cross-cultural perspective. Students, though from different angles, drew on both the novel text and the Chinese concept of filial piety.

S4: Paul's devotion to his mother may look like Chinese filial piety at first, since he always seeks her approval and feels guilty when he fails her. But the difference matters. His dependence is so extreme that he can't build his own life. In true filial piety, honoring parents and starting one's own family shouldn't conflict. Here Mrs. Morel treats Miriam as a rival, so Paul's loyalty turns into an emotional prison, not a virtue.

S5: If we apply filial piety strictly, Paul would actually be unfilial in the bigger picture. Continuing the family line is a core Confucian duty, but Paul almost gives up marriage and children for his mother's possessive love. His extreme dependence betrays the larger purpose of filial piety. He's trapped in a twisted, narrow form of it.

S6: The novel keeps me thinking about guilt. Paul easily hates Miriam when he senses his mother's suffering, which echoes the filial fear of hurting one's parents. But Lawrence shows how such guilt can consume a person. Mrs. Morel almost "eats" her son's spirit. So the so-called filial piety here becomes a destructive force, and just as Miriam finally realizes, Mrs. Morel still owns Paul.

On this question, Student 4 acknowledged that Paul's constant need for his mother's approval, and the guilt he feels when he fails her bears a surface resemblance to the "obedience" which has been valued in Chinese filial piety. But the similarity is only skin-deep. The real insight of his answer lies in recognizing that mature filial piety does not stop a child from starting a family of his own. Mrs. Morel, by contrast, turns Miriam into an emotional rival, so Paul's loyalty becomes a kind of emotional prison that prevents him from building a self, and this point moves the discussion past easy cultural parallels. Student 5's answer seems more provocative. Reversing the angle, he invokes the Confucian maxim that the gravest unfilial act is to leave no descendants, then argues that Paul nearly sacrifices marriage and children for his mother's possessive love, something that actually betrays the deeper purpose of filial piety. The shift is illuminating that Chinese cultural resources are used here to dismantle the appearance of filial conduct in Paul's behavior, exposing extreme attachment as a departure from, rather than an expression of, filial spirit. And Student 6 heads in a different direction, drawing out "guilt" as a cross-culturally recognizable mechanism. He notes that Paul hates Miriam easily when he senses his mother's suffering which is a fear of hurting one's parents and this is quite controversial in a filial context. Lawrence, though, reveals how that guilt can consume the soul since the folk term "spiritual devouring" lets the student visualize Mrs. Morel's possessiveness, and he ties this to Miriam's final recognition that, even after death, Mrs. Morel still owns Paul. The result is a tragic motif with broad resonance ----- love without boundaries leads to destruction.

The three responses above are not isolated but move from differentiating concepts to a reverse deconstruction, and then to abstracting a common psychological mechanism while drawing on local imagery. This shows that good cross-cultural questions can get students to tap into their own cultural background, the kind of teaching of which not only enriches the reading of Western classics but also builds students' cultural discernment rooted locally yet open to difference, and blends Chinese and Western perspectives for deeper understanding.

(2) Ways of Thinking

In this lesson, students did not simply arrive at a fuller interpretation of the novel through cross-cultural reading and logical reasoning. They also became more aware of how they think. Many questionnaire responses show students reflecting on the quality of their own reasoning, with frequent mentions of multiple perspectives and the weight of evidence.

S7: What impressed me most was answering the final selected questions. It exposed quite a few holes in my thinking, and at the same time gave me lots of fresh, varied ideas.

S8: Evaluating and responding to questions left a strong impression on me. Seeing everyone pool their ideas, I realized most classmates shared the same doubts, but the process of working through them

produced many different conclusions—that is the diversity of thinking.

S9: It began when I noticed someone thought differently from me, and I went through “verifying–doubting–verifying–confirming”, which deepened my understanding. (Student Questionnaire)

It is clear from these responses that students enjoy whole-class discussion, sharing, and even disagreement in this inquiry-based reading reports class, seeing that classroom interaction allows them to voice their own views while listening to others, and in doing so they draw on others’ strengths to fill gaps in their own reading. Beyond that, students have noticed the importance of evidence that a grounded reading has to be built on textual details rather than subjective assumption. In the peer review of reading reports, likewise, students received feedback from classmates and, by assessing others and reflecting on the contrast, noticeable weaknesses in their own writing that they could address in future reports.

(3) Reading Strategies

In the interviews, students said they had come to see the value of the process “posing one’s own questions—trying to answer them—and sharing with peers”. Inquiry, as they explained, does more than novel comprehension as the questions raised can push them to think further. Moreover, many students went beyond recognizing the importance of asking questions and reported that they had learned how to design valuable and meaningful ones, and their learning outcomes bear this out well. Below are some of the reasons students gave when explaining how they selected the best questions.

- It focuses on the details and encourages us to think critically and explore the truth behind the story.
- It shows a clash of opinions (conflicts) in the story.
- The questions are brief but inspiring. They lead us to think deeper about this book and relate it to real life. (Student Work)

All in all, in this lesson, students’ critical thinking was fully demonstrated by the “reading–questioning–responding–sharing–commenting” process. Through reasoned inquiry they reached a deeper understanding of the novel, and in doing so became more aware of the importance of multiple perspectives, textual evidence, and a cultural discernment that is locally grounded yet open to difference.

4. Results Discussion: Factors Promoting Critical Thinking that Bridges Eastern and Western Perspectives

In this lesson, the development of students’ critical thinking across Eastern and Western perspectives was closely tied to novel reading, the reading report activity, and the role of the instructor.

(1) The Novel Reading Session

The process of examining evidence and seeking truth is central to critical thinking, and *Sons and Lovers*, as a full-length novel, opened up such a space for students on the grounds that its rich psychological detail invites readers to sift evidence and probe deeper truths. To judge whether Paul’s

emotional attachment to his mother approximates Chinese filial piety, students had to return repeatedly to the novel for key details such as Mrs. Morel's claim that Miriam would "suck a man's soul out", Paul's suffocating feeling that Miriam wanted "only his soul, not him", and Miriam's final realization that even after death, Mrs. Morel still owned Paul. In gathering and weighing such evidence, students gradually saw the tension between the appearance of "obeying one's parent" and the reality of emotional possession, and so moved beyond facile cultural comparison toward a fuller inquiry into the characters' motives and the novel's truth. Lastly, using filial piety as an analytical lens, students tested whether Western emotional logic could align with an Eastern ethical concept while also reflecting on the limits of their own cultural framework. This cross-cultural search for evidence and truth kept pushing students back and forth between perspectives, sharpening evidence-based argumentation and nourishing the kind of critical literacy that bridges East and West.

(2) The Reading Report Activity

The reading report activity played a vital role in cultivating humanistic qualities that embrace both Western perspectives and local concerns. It involved three tasks which are selecting the best question and justifying the choice, briefly summarizing key plot points, and responding to one chosen question. To select the best question, students had to read through all their classmates' questions, absorbing viewpoints from different angles. Summarizing required them to grasp the main story while separating key information from secondary details. Responding to a question demanded close attention to textual evidence so that they had to reason logically from the novel and support their views with apt quotations and argumentation. Beyond that, the reading report objectified students' thinking and served as the main basis for classroom discussion. As they spoke and listened, students could compare their own views with those of others in a more immediate way, spot differences, and become aware of gaps or blind spots in their own reading.

(3) The Teacher's Role

The full exercise and development of students' critical thinking across Eastern and Western perspectives in this lesson owed much to the instructor's role.

The instructor opened up the classroom and gave students ample room for independent thinking and expression. This autonomy was not confined to a single in-class activity but ran through multiple stages before and after the lesson. By asking students to raise their own questions about the novel, for instance, the instructional focus and difficulties were no longer prescribed by the teacher but emerged from students' self-directed reading, understanding, and discussion which reflect students' genuine confusion and interests. Beyond instructional design, the instructor also cultivated an open-minded attitude and the habit of listening to different viewpoints while organizing classroom activities. When students discussed the relationship between Paul's emotional dependence and Chinese filial piety, the teacher neither affirmed nor rejected any answer but invited more students to supply further evidence. The discussion became a highlight of the lesson and unexpectedly prompted students to reflect further on critical thinking:

S10: This class gave us lots of room to think independently, because the teacher asked us to think about and choose questions first, rather than giving us questions and answers to memorize.

S11: “There are a thousand Hamlets in a thousand people’s eyes”. Everyone understands the theme differently from different angles. I saw how my thinking differed from others’, and these differences exposed more possibilities.

S12: If the teacher had just given the answer, I would probably have accepted it as a matter of course. But when I spoke my own view out loud, whether others agreed or disagreed, it really helped my way of thinking. (Student questionnaires)

Most importantly, the instructor wove two criteria which are logical and reflective thinking through every activity. Asking good questions required logical reasoning, such as spotting contradictions or implausibilities in novel details, and selecting the best question demanded reflective thought, such as why someone raised a particular question, what angle they took, what makes a question worth pondering, and how good their own questions were. What makes a question worth pondering? How good were my own questions? Discussion and peer review, too, depended on rational thinking and self-examination which encouraged students to think about whether other classmates had chosen the same best question as he did, whether their criteria were the same as his, the reason why they answered the question differently, whether their answers made sense. Also, every student needed to reflect upon where peers’ reading reports surpassed his own. Through this back-and-forth, students reached the lesson’s goals themselves: they read the novel more closely, got a clearer sense of what makes a good question, and saw where their own reports fell short. Some students even went further as they noted that they had learned to support opinions with evidence rather than empty claims, or had acquired a complete process for reading novels, which accounted for unexpected gains in critical thinking. As students remarked in interviews, the instructor’s objective in this novel reading lesson was not merely to impart knowledge but to foster a transferable way of thinking, a curious, logical, and reflective cast of mind.

5. Conclusion

This case study began with a familiar complaint that English majors in China, despite years of language training, often remain strangers to the critical thinking that literary reading might nourish. Therefore, the remedy proposed here, a lesson built around student-generated questions, collaborative deliberation, and deliberate cross-cultural refraction, offers a modest but tangible alternative to the transmission model that still dominates many literature courses. Through the lens of D.H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers*, the researcher has tried to show that a literary work can become a site of genuine intellectual encounter, provided the pedagogical architecture allows students to bring their own confusions, cultural intuitions, and interpretive disagreements into the open.

What distinguished this teaching design was not its novelty in absolute terms but the way it operationalised a dual-cultural stance without reducing it to a checklist of comparative items. The

students were not asked to apply Western theory to Chinese examples, nor to search for universal human truths. Instead, they were given the freedom to pose their own questions, which suggests that when students are treated as genuine readers, they naturally reach for the cultural resources they already possess, and in doing so, they begin to construct a bilingual, bicritical framework that neither abandons the local nor resists the foreign.

If this teaching reform has a larger import, it lies in its refusal to separate the “literary” from the “humanistic” or the “Western” from the “Chinese local” (Liu, 2018). The teaching of English literature in China has long been caught between the demand for linguistic proficiency and the aspiration for cultural breadth, often sacrificing the latter to the former. This case suggests that the two need not be at odds. When students read a novel as demanding as *Sons and Lovers* with their full intellectual and emotional engagement, and when they argue about its characters and then turn those arguments back onto their own cultural assumptions, they are not just learning English better; they are learning to think in a way that is alert to specificity, tolerant of ambiguity, and grounded in evidence. That, surely, is a form of humanistic education worth pursuing, not because it produces facile cosmopolitans, but because it equips young minds to navigate a world where cultural boundaries are at once persistent and permeable. All in all, though the reform was a small step, its direction toward a pedagogy that honors both the text and the reader’s own cultural horizon is one worth continuing.

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