

Original Paper

A Study on Current Situation and Teaching Strategies of Integrating Chinese Culture into Junior Middle School English Teaching Practice

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Abstract

The newly issued English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 edition) proposes English curriculum of compulsory education embodies the unity of instrumentality and humanism, and has basic, practical and comprehensive characteristics. As the cultivation of students' humanistic literacy takes precedence in today's compulsory English education, it is crucial to not only nurture their linguistic proficiency but also to foster their cultural awareness, attitudes, and understandings. This study aims to investigate the current situation of integrating Chinese culture into junior middle school English teaching and put forward corresponding strategies using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. By analyzing the survey data of a junior middle school students in Jilin Province on the current situation of integrating Chinese culture into English classes, this paper explores the following four strategies: (1) Rekindle Students' Enthusiasm. (2) Reformulate School-based Materials and Curriculum. (3) Refine Pedagogical Approaches. (4) Engage in Extra-curricular Activities. The findings of this study not only inspire English teachers seeking to enhance their strategies in integrating Chinese culture, but also offer valuable insights for contemporary researchers in the field of foreign language education.

Keywords

humanistic quality, Chinese culture integration, junior middle school English teaching

1. Introduction

The new round of scientific and technological revolution is accelerating and the innovation ability and comprehensive quality of talents is increasingly becoming the core to the global competition pattern. With the increasing integration of global cultures, the world increasingly needs a comprehensive understanding of China from a cultural perspective. In recent years, China has advocated Chinese culture in a high level. “We will stay firmly rooted in Chinese culture. We will collect and refine the defining symbols and best elements of Chinese culture such as such famous historical and cultural landscapes, folk festivals, traditional operas etc., and showcase them to the world. We will accelerate the development of China’s discourse and narrative systems, better tell China’s stories, make China’s voice heard, and present a China that is credible, appealing, and respectable”. Also, China has issued various outlines to strengthen education in fine traditional Chinese culture. For example, *Guide to the Curriculum Materials of Fine Traditional Chinese Culture for Primary and Secondary Schools* issued by the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China in 2021 stressed that “based on the internal connection between fine traditional Chinese culture and disciplines, combined with the specific subject, unit, module, etc., into the corresponding fine traditional Chinese culture content and carrier form”. *The English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 edition)* demonstrates that the English teaching process should have both tools and humanistic attributes and teachers should actively infiltrate traditional Chinese culture in English teaching to improve students’ ability to interpret and disseminate fine traditional Chinese culture in English.

Against such context, it is particularly important to infiltrate Chinese culture into junior middle school English classes, improve students’ ability to express Chinese culture in English, enhance their patriotic consciousness and self-confidence in national culture, and thus improve students’ intercultural communication ability.

2. Literature Review**2.1 Studies Abroad**

Foreign scholars conducted a long-term researching cultural teaching, as early as the 1880s, French scholar Gouin (1892) explained the value of culture in language teaching. At the beginning of the 20th century, cultural teaching and research developed rapidly. According to Sandra (2003), foreign language teachers should recognize the value of topics related to mother tongue culture in the teaching process, and incorporate appropriate activities to engage students in the discussion of this topic. In addition, her survey of foreign language teachers shows that more and more teachers are aware of the

role of mother tongue culture in foreign language teaching and try to integrate mother tongue culture into the teaching process. American scholar Sapir (2008) pointed out the separation of language learning and applied culture could not make learners understand the language. Margana (2009) recognized the importance of promoting the development of mother tongue culture in English teaching, because cross-cultural communication is not only one-way communication, but two-way interaction. American scholars Legutke and Thomas (2013) believed that people with cross-cultural awareness tend to be sensitive to the cross-cultural communication contained in daily communication. Kramsch (2014) believed that the purpose of foreign language teaching is not only to master a language, but also to enable learners to comprehend the cultural information embedded in a foreign language to promote language learning. From his point of view, it can be seen that it is necessary to integrate mother tongue culture and foreign language culture in the process of foreign language teaching, which can not only give full play to the advantages of different cultures, but also realize the good interaction of cultures in cross-cultural communication. Therefore, cross-cultural communication is also a process of cultural absorption and transmission.

2.2 Studies at Home

By referring to the pertinent literature, it is found out that domestic researches on the integration of Chinese culture into English teaching mainly focus on the following three aspects: necessity of Chinese culture in foreign language teaching, the causes of Chinese cultural aphasia in foreign language teaching, and the coping strategies on Chinese cultural aphasia in foreign language teaching.

2.2.1 Necessity of Chinese Culture in Foreign Language Teaching

Foreign language learning cannot completely neglect the existence of mother tongue, because there are some commonalities between languages, if we completely abandon mother tongue, great loss will be caused. Simultaneously, we need to understand that the cross-cultural communication is a two-way communication, so we are supposed to pay attention to the teaching of mother tongue culture in foreign language teaching (Liu, 1999). Wen (2016) argues that we should encourage English speakers to learn about multiculturalism. In the context of the pattern of international relations in the new era and China's "the Belt and Road" policy, it is necessary to vigorously advocate and encourage students to express Chinese ideas, China's development path and plans in English. At the same time, we should also be familiar with the cultural traditions of other countries. Her views combine the current situation in China and point out the need to spread Chinese culture.

2.2.2 Causes of Chinese Cultural Aphasia in Foreign Language Teaching

Scholars analyzed the causes of "Chinese cultural aphasia" from various angles. Xu (2013) analyzed the reasons for Chinese cultural aphasia of primary and secondary school students from the perspective of basic education and put forward the following four reasons. Firstly, primary and secondary school English textbooks lack Chinese culture. Secondly, primary and secondary school English teachers lack

cultural awareness and cultural strength. The third reason is that junior middle school students lack Chinese cultural awareness, which is reflected in their lack of understanding and emotion of Chinese culture. The last aspect is the lack of Chinese cultural content in the traditional English exams of primary and secondary schools, which leads to the lack of motivation for teachers to teach and students to learn. In a strategic study on the phenomenon of “Chinese cultural aphasia”, Chen Zhouyun and Tao Weneng (2017) pointed out five reasons including historical reasons for the lack of cultural self-confidence since Opium War, the biased understanding of “cross-cultural communication” leads to the general understanding of cross-cultural communication as a one-way study of foreign culture, a lack of Chinese elements in curriculum and teaching materials the lack of cultural factors in the context of exam-oriented education makes teachers and students pay little attention to Chinese culture in English learning and learner’s own factors. Zhang Yuhong (2021) pointed out that at present, China has not established a complete cultural discipline system, lacks a relatively complete discipline guidance and does not have an effective evaluation mechanism.

2.2.3 Coping Strategies on Chinese Cultural Aphasia in Foreign Language Teaching

With the increasing emphasis on Chinese culture in recent years, scholars have also put forward solutions to Chinese language from different angles on improving aphasia and enhancing Chinese culture teaching. According to a survey conducted by He Lifen (2018), most English teachers hold a positive attitude towards introducing culture, especially Chinese culture, into English classes. In the process of cultivating students’ English expression ability of Chinese culture, teachers and students agree that the proportion of Chinese culture should be increased in English textbooks, and the Chinese and foreign cultures should be analyzed and compared. Wang (2020) found that there is a certain proportion of Chinese culture in junior middle school English textbooks, but teachers should dig deeper into the connotation of Chinese culture and the thinking collision between Chinese and English intercultural communication in the teaching process, so as to develop students’ thinking ability.

From the analysis of the current research landscape on mother tongue culture in foreign language teaching, foreign researchers have early recognized the pivotal role of mother tongue culture in foreign language instruction, which offers valuable insights for Chinese culture integration into foreign language teaching in China. Domestic scholars have made significant strides in integrating Chinese culture into English instruction, providing suggestions to English teachers on incorporating Chinese cultural elements. However, previous studies primarily focus on college and senior high school English education while neglecting junior middle school English instruction as well as junior middle school teachers and students.

3. Research Design

3.1 Research Questions

In order to investigate the current situation of Chinese culture integration into English teaching at junior middle school level, this study primarily addresses the following two inquiries:

- (1) What is the real situation of integrating Chinese culture into junior middle school English teaching?
- (2) How can Chinese culture be effectively integrated into English teaching at the junior middle school level? What are the specific and practical strategies that can be applied for the purpose of integration?

3.2 Research Subjects

In this study, a total of 215 students from six classes in Grade 9 of a particular junior middle school in Jilin Province were investigated. The chosen middle school is an ordinary one located in Changchun City, capital of Jilin Province and the English proficiency level of the students across these six classes falls within the intermediate range for the whole 9 grade.

3.3 Research Tools

In order to comprehend the contemporary students' attitude towards Chinese culture in English learning and their learning situation, as well as gain insight into the current extent of Chinese cultural integration in junior middle school English teaching, this study conducted a questionnaire-based survey. The questionnaire was developed according to scholar Xiao and suitably modified based on the research problem addressed in this paper and students' actual circumstances. This extensively cited questionnaire has been rigorously tested for reliability and validity, making it suitable for employment in this research endeavor. This questionnaire comprises 15 questions. Items 1 to 13 lie in the category of single-choice, designed in a 5-point scale format. Options 1 to 5 correspond to strongly disagree, disagree, unsure, agree, and strongly agree respectively. Items 13 to 15 are multiple-choice questions. To avoid any potential misunderstanding among students, the questionnaire is presented in Chinese language. The content is structured based on five dimensions as detailed in the table below.

Table 1. Design Dimension and Question Number Distribution of the Questionnaire on Middle School Students' Chinese Cultural English Learning Status

Latitude	Item
Students' range of interest in Chinese culture and English expression of Chinese culture	Q1,Q2
Students' familiarity with Chinese culture and English expressions of Chinese culture	Q3,Q4,Q13
Students' comprehension of the significance and necessity of Chinese culture in English learning	Q5,Q6,Q7,Q8
Students' emphasis on English learning of Chinese culture and their learning	Q9,Q10,Q11,Q12

situation after class

Students' expectation for English learning of Chinese culture

Q14,Q15

The results of reliability and validity analysis are as follows.

Table 2. Reliability Analysis of the Questionnaire

Dimensions	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha based on standardize terms	Number of Items
Students' interest	0.752	0.760	2
Students' familiarity	0.693	0.744	2
Students' understanding	0.890	0.890	4
Students' attitude	0.910	0.912	4

From the Table 2, it can be seen the Cronbach's alpha of each dimension is higher than 0.5 and quite close to 1, which indicates that the reliability of the questionnaire is relatively high. To ensure its reliability, a small-scale pilot test was also conducted wherein students were given complete freedom and relaxation while anonymously completing the questionnaire.

4. Results

According to the research, 215 questionnaires were issued and 215 were collected, among which 215 were valid, with a recovery rate of 100% and an effective rate of 100%. This paper will present the results of the questionnaire through various charts and graphs, mainly from the perspective of "students' understanding of Chinese traditional culture and teaching Chinese culture in English classes".

Table 3. Students' Level of Interest in Chinese Culture and English Expression of Chinese Culture

Latitude	Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Normal	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
Interest	1. I am interested in Chinese culture.	0%	0.47%	0.93%	10.23%	88.37%	1.13
	2. I am interested in learning to express Chinese culture in English.	5.12%	8.84%	17.67%	24.19%	44.19%	2.07

The purpose of Item 1 and 2 is to assess students' level of interest in Chinese culture and their proficiency in expressing it in English. Based on the data results, there is a strong inclination towards Chinese culture among students (88.37%). However, their enthusiasm for learning to express Chinese culture in English remains at only 44.16%, with an average score of 2.07. In order to identify the underlying reasons, researchers engaged in conversations with students during break time and discovered that lack of interest in English as a subject and fear associated with it might be the primary factors contributing to students' disinterest in acquiring English expressions related to Chinese culture.

Table 4. Students' Familiarity with Chinese Culture and English Expressions of Chinese Culture

Latitude	Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Normal	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
Familiarity	3. I know a lot about Chinese culture.	0%	0.47%	16.28%	37.67%	45.58%	1.72
	4. I am familiar with how to express Chinese culture in English.	13.02%	13.95%	24.65%	21.86%	26.51%	2.65
	13. What difficulties do I face in expressing Chinese culture in English?	Other	Can't say right	Not enough to say	Sentence pattern	Vocabulary	Mean
		6.98%	8.84%	35.35%	33.95%	75.35%	0.75

The initial examination of the data in Table 4 reveals several significant indicators and their corresponding representations. From the perspective of familiarity, the most striking finding is the high level of agreement among students regarding their knowledge about Chinese culture. A remarkable 45.58% of students expressed agreement, while an additional 1.72% strongly agreed, indicating a significantly higher proportion compared to other response options and highlighting the majority's profound understanding and appreciation for Chinese culture. The recognition of Q4 among students demonstrated a significant decline, with only 26.51% of students expressing their agreement or strong agreement, while an alarming 27% opted for disagreement or strong disagreement, which indicates despite possessing knowledge about Chinese culture, there are evident deficiencies in their ability to accurately and effectively express it in English. After conducting further analysis, vocabulary issues accounted for 75.35% and sentence structure problems accounted for 33.95%, thus confirming the challenges students face when expressing Chinese culture in English.

After considering the aforementioned analysis, it becomes apparent that despite students' relatively high familiarity with Chinese culture, they face significant challenges when it comes to expressing

these cultural concepts in English, particularly in terms of vocabulary and sentence structure. This finding suggests that greater emphasis should be placed on fostering students' intercultural communication skills within educational practice, especially regarding training them to articulate Chinese culture in English, thereby enhancing their overall language proficiency and cultural competence.

Table 5. Students' Comprehension of the Importance and Necessity of Chinese Culture in English Learning

Latitude	Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Normal	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
Importance	5. I think the study of Chinese culture is helpful to English study.	3.72%	7.91%	21.86%	20.47%	46.05%	2.03
	6. I think learning Chinese culture can stimulate my interest in learning English.	9.3%	9.3%	18.6%	15.81%	46.98%	2.18
	7. I think it is necessary to learn Chinese culture and its related English expressions.	4.65%	2.79%	11.16%	24.19%	57.21%	1.73
	8. I think it is very important to learn Chinese culture.	2.33%	1.86%	11.63%	19.53%	64.65%	1.58

The data presented in Table 5 unequivocally demonstrates students' profound recognition of the paramount significance and indispensable nature of Chinese culture in the realm of English language acquisition.

The initial observation of note pertains to the significantly high percentage of students who expressed a profound appreciation for the importance of acquiring knowledge about Chinese culture. For instance, with regards to Q8, an overwhelming 64.65% of students selected the response "strongly agree", which represents the highest proportion within the given data set. This statistic unequivocally indicates that a vast majority of students firmly acknowledge and embrace the notion that assimilating Chinese cultural aspects constitutes an indispensable component within the realm of English language acquisition.

Secondly, with regard to Q6, although a minor 9.3% of students expressed disagreement or strong disagreement, a substantial 46.98% strongly concurred, signifying that delving into Chinese cultural studies exerts a positive influence on augmenting interest in English learning.

Furthermore, a significant majority of 57.21% of the students strongly agree with the notion that acquiring knowledge about Chinese culture and its associated English expressions is imperative for effective English language acquisition.

Table 6. Students' Emphasis on English Learning of Chinese Culture and Their Learning Situation after Class

Latitude	Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Normal	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
Learning after class	9. When I encounter unfamiliar Chinese culture, I usually deal with it in a positive attitude, such as consulting teacher and referring to relevant materials.	2.79%	3.26%	14.42%	20%	59.53%	1.70
	10. I pay attention to the study and accumulation of Chinese cultural knowledge in English learning.	2.33%	3.72%	16.74%	23.72%	53.49%	1.78
	11. After class, I often read English books or videos related to Chinese culture.	9.77%	10.23%	23.26%	23.72%	33.02%	2.40
	12. After class, I can easily get access to English materials related to Chinese culture.	5.12%	10.7%	22.79%	20.93%	40.47%	2.19

The data reveals the diversity in students' inclination towards post-class learning of Chinese culture and the actual situation. Notably, a significant majority of students exhibit a positive attitude towards engaging with Chinese cultural studies after class. It is evident from Q9 and Q10 that a significant majority of students exhibit a favorable disposition towards incorporating Chinese culture into the process of English language acquisition (nearly 80%). Q11 and Q12 pertain to students' engagement with Chinese culture in an English context outside of class. In comparison to Q9 and Q10, it is observed that a smaller proportion of students frequently engage with English literature or audiovisual content related to Chinese culture (over 50%).

Table 7. Students' Expectations for Learning Chinese Culture in English

Latitude	Item	Others	Food culture	Folk art	Places of interests	Festival custom	Mean
Expectation	14. What kind of Chinese culture would you like to learn during your English study?	14.42%	43.26%	48.37%	50.23%	56.95%	0.54
	15. Which way would you like to choose to learn Chinese culture in English?	Others	Compare Chinese with others	Group discussion and collaboration	Situational dialogue, role play	Teacher explains	Mean
		11.16%	32.09%	31.63%	53.95%	44.19%	0.44

The analysis of data uncovers numerous significant features and trends. In terms of Q14, festival customs and places of interest were the preferred choices for more than half of the students (50%+). Chinese folk art was desired by 48.37% of the students, while 43.26% expressed an interest in learning about food culture. A smaller percentage showed curiosity towards other aspects of Chinese culture such as fairy stories, game culture, literature, and stage culture (14.42%). Q15 focused on the methods to learn Chinese culture. The results indicated that 44.19% of the students favored teachers' explanations of vocabulary to convey cultural meanings, whereas situational dialogues or role-plays were chosen by 53.95%. Additionally, 31.63% believed in group discussions and cooperation as effective means to understand Chinese culture, while another 32.09% expressed a desire to compare native and foreign cultures for their cultural exploration.

After conducting a comprehensive analysis of Table 7, we can draw the following conclusions: Firstly, students demonstrate a profound interest in acquiring knowledge about Chinese culture, particularly its traditional aspects such as festival customs. Secondly, when it comes to their preferred learning style, students tend to gravitate towards mainstream and practical methods while remaining receptive to innovative approaches. Thirdly, students not only seek practical experiences but also expect professional guidance and explanations from their teachers in learning.

According to the aforementioned survey results, it is evident that the following issues arise:

Firstly, while a majority of students exhibit an interest in Chinese culture, their enthusiasm is not ignited when it comes to acquiring English expressions related to Chinese culture. After engaging in discussions with the students, the researcher discovered that this lack of interest stems primarily from their disinterest in the English subject and apprehension towards encountering difficulties due to their inadequate foundation in English.

Secondly, while the majority of students possess a certain level of familiarity with Chinese culture, they encounter difficulties in effectively expressing it in English. Furthermore, their limited vocabulary repertoire, unfamiliarity with sentence patterns and expressions, as well as inadequate comprehension of Chinese cultural nuances pose significant obstacles to their expression of Chinese culture in English. Thirdly, although the majority of students acknowledge the significance of acquiring knowledge about Chinese culture in English, they lack a profound comprehension of its importance and necessity, as well as the specific impacts it has.

Lastly, it is imperative for numerous students to allocate greater emphasis towards acquiring English expressions pertaining to their indigenous culture, fortifying their Chinese heritage, and adopting a more constructive approach towards it.

5. Practical Teaching Strategies

5.1 Rekindle Students' Enthusiasm

The limited integration of Chinese cultural knowledge in the junior middle school English proficiency test constitutes one of the external factors influencing strategies devised by junior middle school English teachers for integrating Chinese culture into English teaching, as well as students' interest in learning about Chinese culture. When language and culture are separated, language learning becomes a sterile pursuit unless a directly instrumental motivation is present (Shirley, 2021). Therefore, considering the compulsory English curriculum standards and the physical, mental, and cognitive development characteristics of junior middle school students, it would be appropriate to augment the proportion of examination on Chinese culture within various junior middle school English tests. This adjustment aims to foster greater attention among both junior middle school English teachers and students towards acquiring knowledge about Chinese culture through their English language education.

5.2 Reformulate School-based Materials and Curriculum

In order to explore a viable strategy for integrating Chinese culture into junior middle school English teaching, it is insufficient to solely rely on the inherent content of Chinese culture in the textbook. Therefore, based on fulfilling their teaching responsibilities, junior middle school English teachers can collaborate with their counterparts and relevant researchers to use media to develop region-specific school-based textbooks and curriculum that integrate elements of Chinese culture. The more efficient the media is in communicating, the more effective it is in stabilising or destabilising existing social, political, cultural, economic, legal, religious and moral arrangements (Ambirajan, 2000). For instance, under the guidance of education researchers familiar with Jilin Province's regional cultural characteristics, a teacher has designed a school-based textbook highlighting attributes related to "Ji", encompassing English introductions to Northeast China's cuisine, aesthetics, culture, and history.

5.3 Refine Pedagogical Approaches

In the context of teaching English in junior middle school, educators have the opportunity to integrate Chinese culture through various pedagogical approaches. These include utilizing a warm-up method known as the “three minutes before class”, providing background introductions, employing direct instruction techniques, supplementing with cultural content, comparing Chinese and Western cultures, encouraging classroom activity participation, analyzing discourse and practicing imitative writing skills, etc. Additionally, it is crucial for teachers to adhere to principles such as maintaining moderation in cultural integration efforts while ensuring stage progression aligned with students’ abilities and interests; fostering relevance by connecting Chinese and Western cultures to real-life situations; applying student interest-driven strategies; promoting enlightenment through comprehensive exploration of Chinese traditions.

For instance, in instructional design, situational dramas can be integrated and references to movies and TV dramas can be made to simulate the plot content depicting the clash between American culture and Chinese culture. In the teaching process, teachers can select a common news event and assist students in observing cross-cultural thinking patterns as well as potential political stances conveyed by different media organizations through their respective reports. After class, teachers can utilize cloud-based classrooms to engage in direct dialogues with international acquaintances, facilitating cultural integration and fostering interpersonal connections among students. More recent research has shown that teachers identify online communities of practice as effective and appealing forms of learning, and report positive experiences that include exposure to novel instructional practices, the promotion of diverse voices, changes to classroom practices, and increased confidence (Greenhow & Askari, 2017; Lants-Andersson et al., 2018; Parsons et al., 2019). This approach not only enhances classroom interaction but also enables students to deepen their comprehension of cultural connotations through practical experiences, thereby internalizing their own cultural encounters.

5.4 Engage in Extra-curricular Activities

Based on research conducted on the strategy of integrating Chinese culture into junior middle school English teaching, it has been revealed that relying solely on classroom teaching is insufficient for achieving effective integration. Therefore, it is imperative for teachers to effectively utilize extra-curricular activities as a blended learning to actively engage students in diverse and captivating experiences related to Chinese culture. With the development of society, blended learning has become a critical element in the ensemble of learning and teaching approaches in Post-school Education and Training (PSET) as a means to provide flexible and pedagogically inclusive education (Raban & Mayisela, 2022). By doing so, students can genuinely appreciate the allure of exceptional Chinese culture through practical extracurricular activities and cultivate a profound sense of national pride. For instance, in the context of film education, multimedia teaching methods and resources are employed to

guide students in utilizing Chinese cultural works as a means to depict diverse cultural perspectives and approaches. This enables students to apply this foundational knowledge in practical scenarios.

6. Discussion

In summary, this article aims to study how to integrate Chinese culture into junior middle school English teaching under the perspective of humanistic literacy. By analyzing the survey data of a junior middle school students in Jilin province, the author found some current situations like the lack of interest and fundamental knowledge in expressing Chinese culture in English and put forward four practical teaching strategies accordingly: (1) Rekindle Students' Enthusiasm. (2) Reformulate School-based Materials and Curriculum. (3) Refine Pedagogical Approaches. (4) Engage in Extra-curricular Activities. Through innovative teaching forms and relevant teaching situations, teachers should arouse students' interest in learning Chinese culture in English so as to improve the cultural literacy education and teaching mode of English knowledge in junior middle school constantly.

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Notes

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