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# A Study on Integrating Traditional Chinese Culture into College English Teaching

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**Abstract:** College English Curriculum Requirements, launched by Ministry of Education in indicated that the instruction of college English is part of higher education. College English, guided by foreign language teaching theory, mainly involves English knowledge and practical skills, cross-cultural communication and learning strategy. Its instructional goal is training students' comprehensive and practical ability, especially their listening and speaking skills. Thus, they can communicate with others in English in their study, work and social intercourse, increase their capacity of independent study and overall cultural awareness, so as to fit well with the demands of national development and international exchange. College English is not only a basic course to learn language, but also to expand knowledge and know global cultures. It is a tool with cultural connotation. Thus, we must take full consideration of training students' cultural awareness and teaching worldwide cultural knowledge while designing the college English courses. That means College English Curriculum Requirements attach importance to culture. It is an irresistible trend that language and culture is of equal significance. Therefore, Teachers must enhance their cultural cultivation, store cross-culture knowledge and draw lessons from advanced teaching theory. Through various teaching and extracurricular activities, they should enhance students' awareness of cross-culture and communication competence, as well as the cognition and understanding of different countries and cultures. The most important is to integrate traditional Chinese culture into College English teaching, transmitting excellent and elegant traditional Chinese culture. In this way, we can cultivate graduates with both solid professional foundation and ability of international exchange.

**Keywords:** College English Teaching, Integrating, Traditional Chinese Culture, Intercultural Communication

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## 1. Introduction

In the Outline of National Medium-and Long-Term Program for Education Reform and Development, the section of higher education pointed out that we should strengthen international communication and cooperation. Drawing lessons from advanced educational ideas and experience in the world, we could promote the education reform and development in China and increase our international status, influence and competitiveness. Adapting to the social and economic request of opening up, we should cultivate plenty of international talents with broad horizons who have a good understanding of international rules and can participate in international affairs and competitions. Meanwhile, we should reinforce the education for international understanding and promote the intercultural exchange, increasing students' cognition and understanding of

different countries and cultures [1]. Thus, teachers, especially college English teachers, need to deeply understand the importance of culture, constantly enrich their intercultural knowledge, proactively change their teaching methods and set up a concept that language and culture is of equal importance. Besides, they also have to enhance students' cross-cultural communication competence with effective methods [2], integrating traditional Chinese culture into College English teaching, transmitting excellent and elegant traditional Chinese culture, through which we can keep pace with the times and increase their cultivation of foreign culture. This thesis will expounds the relationship between culture, language and culture teaching from the perspective of theoretical knowledge; At the same time, the problems faced in culture teaching in College English teaching are analyzed in details through questionnaire survey method, personal interview and case analysis; Finally, the strategies of culture

teaching especially integrate traditional Chinese culture into College English teaching, transmitting excellent and elegant traditional Chinese culture, this kind of measures are put forward in view of the specific problems in College English teaching, aiming at improving the level of culture teaching in College English, making teachers and students realize the importance of culture, increasing college students' degree of recognition on enriching cultural awareness, and improving non-English majors' cultural sensitivity.

## 2. Important Concepts

One outstanding feature of intercultural communication is that different culture would bring many differences in aspects like language, society, history, living environment, custom, communicative rules, thinking mode and even values. Thus, in cross-cultural communication, people are used to the indigenous culture and extremely sensitive to other culture. So it is hard to avoid the difficulties while understanding and communicating. There is close relationship between culture and language and they are complementary. So, culture teaching is necessary part in language teaching. Many experts and scholars make contributions for improving the theories of them. So it is extremely important for College English teachers to integrate traditional Chinese culture into College English teaching, transmitting excellent and elegant traditional Chinese culture. Cultivating graduates with both solid professional foundation and awareness of culture.

### 2.1. Definition of Communication

“Communication” has a close relation with “commonality”. “Communicate” derived from Latin word, *communis*, which means common. Obviously, “communicate” is closely related to “commonness”, namely the latter or “share” is the premise of the former. Besides, only people from same culture can share in many aspects and conduct effective communication. That means the connotation of “commonness” is the same as the “communicate” and “culture” [3]. Symbol is a main tool to communicate, any of which can be used. That means verbal, non-verbal symbol and any other signs all can be used to communicate. Symbol, a generalized concept, involves close ones like body and spoken language, and distant ones, such as signs depending on auditory and visual sense and smell, as well as symbols transcending time and space like pictures and characters. [4] “Communicate” is a process to code and decode, while exchange of information is the same activity happening in one's mind. Coding is a course to encode thoughts, feelings and ideas into symbols like verbal or non-verbal activities and written language; decoding is a process to give meaning to and explain the symbols and information from the outside. Communication, a cultural and social activity, definitely happens in the society and is affected and restricted by lots of factors in the society. These factors include: wide environment, such as values, cultural orientation and cosmology; social structure, psychological factors; physical factors and etc.. Context factor, including bilateral social status, character, relationship and the place,

time and topics, subjects to the broad cultural environment and directly influences it. Due to the masses of variety, there always exists a distance between the message delivered by the one coding it and the meaning received by the one decoding it. In the cross-cultural communication, giving meaning to something is really a complex process because of the differences in various societies.

### 2.2. Concept of Culture

Culture is a very broad concept. Different scholars have different opinion. So the definition of culture has been debated for a long time, and scholars and experts at home and abroad have given different explanations from different aspects and fields. In the Chinese, because of the different context, the connotation and extension of culture is very rich. In ancient China, culture has two main meanings, one refers to the constraints of society, such as ceremony system and the statutes, and another refers to the human domestication, and it's also called education nowadays. And The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary contains three interpretations of culture, and some of the definitions are related to the ancient meanings. In English, culture is also a complex, inexplicable word, because it experienced a complex historical evolution, so, culture exists in several languages in the world. Moreover, the term culture is an important concept in several different disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology, archaeology, and so on. The British anthropologist Edward Tylor's definition of culture in his book *Primitive Culture* was still one of the most extensive and accurate, and up to now, it had a great impact in many fields. His definition is that culture and civilization are a combination of knowledge, belief, art, morality, law, custom and any other abilities and customs acquired as individuals of the community. Culture is very complex definition, but as the product of human society, it should include the sum of human material civilization and spiritual civilization. In foreign language teaching, culture refers to the historical geography, customs, traditional customs, way of life, literature and art, behavior norms, and values of the target language country. Because the definition of culture is various, and many scholars and experts also have different opinions about the classification of culture. According to the category of culture, it can be divided into two types, narrow sense and broad sense. The narrow definition of culture only refers to spiritual civilization. The broad culture refers to the sum of the material civilization and spiritual civilization created by human beings in the development of the society.

### 2.3. Definition of Language

Language belongs to culture and reflect culture, what is language on earth? Many experts and scholars have tried to define language, including not only linguists, such as Saussure, Chomsky, but also anthropologists, sociologists and even philosophers. Because they come from different aspects and fields, they also have different understanding about the definitions of language. Saussure thinks that language is a symbolic system; Chomsky thinks that language is a unique

mechanism of capability in the human brain; others think that language is a social phenomenon; and Sapir thinks that language is a tool of human communication. However, there is a common understanding of language, which is generally believed that language, human society and culture are inextricably linked. So most experts and scholars agree that the definition of language is a kind of tool people used to communicate with arbitrary sound symbol system. And from this definition, we can easily find there is close relationship between language and culture. Language, as a tool of human communication, is inevitably influenced by culture. It has many functions, such as informative function, interpersonal function, emotive function and recreational function and so on. There is close relationship between language and culture.

### **3. Importance of Integrating Traditional Chinese Culture into College English Teaching**

On account of the cultural diversity, every social phenomenon and communicative behavior looks so unfamiliar, while others' actions seem so "weird". Thus, it is difficult to conduct effective cross-cultural communication, which requires us to correctly handle complicated cultural misunderstanding, even conflicts. We must constantly eliminate the problems caused by cultural obstruction. In intercultural communication, we should not only pay attention to the correctness of our verbal and non-verbal behavior, but also the appropriateness of it [5]. So, college teachers must attach equal importance to language and culture and train students' ability in cross-cultural communication. At the same time, integrating traditional Chinese culture into College English teaching, transmitting excellent and elegant traditional Chinese culture.

#### **3.1. Make the Students Understand the Traditional Chinese Culture Deeply**

As the study on cultural subjects like intercultural communication and second language teaching go further, people gradually know the significance of culture in association. Lack of knowledge about the cultural connotation in communicative language always causes social barriers, which is beyond count. Communication cannot do without language, so do the culture. The basic attribute of culture lies in its nationality. "Each nation has its own living habit, custom, religion, ethic and aesthetic sentiment, which constitute its cultural core." Applying to language and experiencing a long period, they gradually form a set of language communication rules. That means different culture and language leads to various rules to guide language communication behaviors. To someone shared same culture, he acquires associative rules and language at the same pace. In cross-cultural communication, if one fails to have clear awareness of it, or the other one know little about the rules, he or she may get accustomed to it without understanding. So he would use his own rules to comprehend others, or impose his ideas upon

others unconsciously, which leads to pragmatic failure or social barrier. Therefore, college English teachers should not only let students master our language communication rules, but also guide them to deeply understand the cultural habits and socio-cultural background of English-speaking countries and know various values and beliefs existing in different nations [6], integrating traditional Chinese culture into College English teaching, transmitting excellent and elegant traditional Chinese culture.

#### **3.2. Make the Students Adapt to the Development of Multicultural Times**

We are in an era of diverse culture or postmodernism. Highly-advanced scientific technology, especially the highly-modernized media, makes our world change dramatically. Global village, a term raised by Marshall McLuhan, is used to describe the effect brought by the development of media. New social media has already expanded the dense of our social structure, while the new communication technology has surpassed our capacity as human being—the conversations with people from different cultures we might participate has surmounted our limitation. The people we have dialogue with are not only acquaintances, but also strangers belonging to various cultures, races and nationalities. What's more, the channel and tool of information also exceeds original scopes. So to speak, association between any two people is intercultural communication in varying degrees. In postmodern society, using single language to express one is beyond enough. It is, obviously, a society with diversified cultures and languages. Interpersonal communication is both hopeful and dangerous, because every conversation may become cross-cultural—we may walk to the edge of our own culture at any moment. The culture we encounter could be totally divergent from our own one. At that time, we must face the challenges whether we have common languages with others [7]. Hence, in college English class, teachers should guide students to understand and appreciate multi-culture and gradually train their intercultural communication ability, integrating traditional Chinese culture into College English teaching,

#### **3.3. There Is Close Relationship Between Culture and Language**

Language belongs to culture and it reflects culture, The influence of culture on language is mainly reflected in two aspects. Firstly, culture plays an important role in the emergence and development of various linguistic elements in the language system. For example, the emergence of a new word is often influenced by religious beliefs, national customs, morals, laws, and so on. In addition, culture has a great influence on language thought and language expression. For example, there is a great difference between their linguistic thinking and language expression in Chinese and English [8]. The expression of the same things under the influence of the Chinese and western cultures is very different. Therefore, culture has a profound influence on

language, which tells us that language learning will do more with less if students pay more attention to the corresponding culture learning when learning a language. Language also has a great influence on culture. Language is the reflection of culture in a certain period, and when we use language, it exists as the media of culture. It is not only a bridge between people in the world, but also a vehicle of spreading different cultures. However, at the same time, language has a restrictive effect on the development and dissemination of culture [9]. The spread of culture became difficult because of the differences of language thought and language expression between different languages in the same period. What's more, the differences of language and expression between the same languages at different times also made the development of culture even more difficult. Culture and language are closely linked and inseparable in many ways for they influence each other. Human culture has the possibility to continue to nowadays precisely because of the emergence and development of language. Language, as the carrier of culture, has witnessed the emergence and development of human culture for thousands of years. It not only transmits culture, but also reflects culture.

## **4. The Problems of Integrating Traditional Chinese Culture into College English**

Integrating traditional Chinese culture into college English can improve the students' understanding of culture and the awareness of transmitting excellent and elegant traditional Chinese culture to the world. We can investigate and analyze the teacher's understanding and implementation of culture teaching, doing research on the problems of English culture teaching in college English [10].

### ***4.1. Some Tutors Lack Awareness of Integrating Traditional Chinese Culture into College English***

We read many literature and do the research by questionnaire, some teachers think that culture teaching is very important in college English teaching, especially Integrating traditional Chinese culture into college English, but a few college English teachers still lack culture awareness in teaching. the purpose of teaching English is to improve their English scores and pass CET4 and CET6. They pay more attention to the improvement of their scores than cultivate the students' interest in English. Some college English teachers tried to teach culture in English class [11], but they just choose west culture and didn't integrate traditional Chinese culture into college English, it's difficult for the students to get their attention for this kind of culture teaching, So it makes students feel boring in class and culture teaching is not effective. Through the analysis of the students' questionnaire, it can be found that most students are interested in English culture learning in fact, and realize the importance of traditional Chinese culture in English learning as well as British and American culture. However, students' culture awareness and

understanding of culture knowledge are not enough. And from the teacher's interview, it can also be learned that teachers lack of systematic teaching methods and strategies in the English culture teaching [12]. Because of various reasons there are still many problems in the English culture teaching in college English, which require teachers to use various culture teaching strategies to meet students' learning needs, of course, the most important is to improve the teachers' culture awareness in college English teaching.

### ***4.2. The Teachers Didn't Make Full use of Relevant Traditional Chinese Cultural Source***

Although traditional Chinese cultural source is extremely rich and colorful, such as opera, architecture, nature, local custom, history, literature and so on, some college English teachers didn't make full use of these resource in teaching. Many teachers try to make brief introduction and description of Western culture as well as traditional Chinese culture, but it's not systematic and complete. They did not fully take into account the characteristics of college students, nor did it closely link the student's academic knowledge. Therefore, it cannot attract student's attention, stimulating student's interest in English learning, and it is not easy for students to fully understand the culture of language. Of course, it is difficult to achieve the goal of comprehensively improving students' culture awareness and cultural competence. Although many learning material are related to the understanding of western culture or the comparison of Chinese and Western culture, but most of culture knowledge are relatively simple, so it is easy for students to feel boring in learning English culture and they are also not very impressed by the learning materials. There are also some articles about the differences between Chinese and foreign schools. It only roughly talks about the differences, but the cultural reasons of these differences are solely mentioned, which makes students confused and without understanding culture background. So college English teachers should make full use of traditional Chinese cultural source in preparing lesson and try to integrating traditional Chinese culture into college English teaching [13], guiding the students to improve the awareness of transmitting excellent and elegant traditional Chinese culture in the world.

### ***4.3. The Teachers' Competence of Integrating Traditional Chinese Culture into College English Teaching Should Be Improved***

Learning and teaching are endless. With the development of society and the progress of times, college students of non-English majors will have higher expectation for college English teachers than the old days. Nevertheless from the questionnaire and the observation of the teaching, it can be found that the methodology of culture teaching of college English teachers is not very flexible, just introducing the culture knowledge directly and organizing students to watch the corresponding film and relevant works, not integrating traditional Chinese culture into college English teaching, Introducing the culture directly will make students think that it

is too rigid, so they feel meaningless, and lack of interest. Organizing students to watch the video can't be used very frequently due to the limited teaching time. Besides, it is not benefit for students to get the complete and continuous culture knowledge just by watching the fragments of videos. Culture teaching is a great challenge for English teachers who accustomed to language teaching in the class. Culture teaching not only requires teachers to learn more knowledge by themselves, but also to understand the culture knowledge of the target language. What's more, it also requires teachers to use some teaching methods and strategies to make the culture teaching in college English class more interesting and vivid [14], and easier for students to accept. The teacher can help students get motivation of English learning by integrating traditional Chinese culture into college English teaching, letting college students be pride of elegant traditional Chinese culture. The teachers' competence of integrating traditional Chinese culture into college English teaching Should be improved continuously.

## **5. How to Promote the Teachers' Competence of Integrating Traditional Chinese Culture into College English Teaching**

College English is part of higher education. College English, guided by foreign language teaching theory, mainly involves English knowledge and practical skills, cross-cultural communication and learning strategy. Its instructional goal is to train the students' comprehensive and practical ability, especially their listening and speaking skills. Thus, they can communicate with others in English in their study, work and social intercourse, increase their capacity of independent study and overall cultural awareness. Traditional Chinese culture is so elegant that it is the duty of college English teachers to transmit excellent traditional Chinese culture. College English teachers' Competence of Integrating Traditional Chinese culture into college English teaching should be promoted frequently and continuously.

### **5.1. College English Teachers Should Intensify the Awareness of Integrating Traditional Chinese Culture into College English Teaching**

Since there is close relationship between culture and language, and language belongs to culture and it reflects culture. College English teachers must intensify the awareness of cultural teaching and integrate traditional Chinese culture in teaching. Guide the students to transmit excellent traditional Chinese culture. The influence of culture on language is obvious. Culture plays an important role in the development of various linguistic elements in the language system. Some college English teachers were not aware of the importance of culture teaching, they rarely implement culture teaching in English class and lack of experiences. They are not familiar any specific methods and strategies of culture teaching in

college English. So school of foreign languages and college English teachers must try their best to create good culture learning atmosphere, letting the students union, clubs and societies organize some activities, adding some English cultural saloon, such as organize English culture corner on campus. In this way, students can learn about English culture by themselves in their spare time. At the same time, colleges and teachers can hold some activities about English culture in school or in class, such as English drama competitions, lectures and competitions about traditional Chinese culture and western culture knowledge and so on [15]. Besides these activities, the department and teachers can organize students to celebrate some holidays in traditional Chinese and native way of western countries, such as Spring Festival, Zhongqiu Festival, Thanksgiving Day, Easter, Halloween, and so on. By this way it is possible to increase students' understanding of Chinese and Western culture by integrating traditional Chinese culture into College English Teaching, comparing the differences between Chinese and Western festivals. There are still many problems of culture teaching in college English. But first of all, the most important is to intensify the teachers' cultural awareness, integrating traditional Chinese culture into College English Teaching.

### **5.2. College English Teachers Must Make the Most of the Resources of Traditional Chinese Culture in Teaching**

China an ancient civilized nation with over 5000 years long history. Traditional Chinese culture is very rich and colorful. In order to make cultural teaching vivid and can attract the students attention, motivating their interest, college English teachers must make the most of traditional Chinese culture and integrate them in teaching. Guide the students to transmit excellent traditional Chinese culture. In preparation of teaching teacher should try their best to choose interest cultural teaching materials, for it play an important role in stimulate the students' learning interest. If the cultural teaching material is too difficult to meet the development needs of student's ability and cultural awareness, it is necessary for teachers to change teaching resource and combine the contents of teaching with the needs of students and the requirements of the times and society. But the detailed interpretation of the cultural teaching resources requires higher requirements for the teachers and they should have higher culture quality and teaching ability. So college English teachers must learn and try to be familiar with traditional Chinese culture, improving the teachers culture quality and the ability. They can interpret the relevant cultural resources in college English teaching exactly. Then the students will be interested in learning English and culture. At the same time the teachers need to analyze the student's feature and requirements, according to the needs of students, college English teachers can use multimedia and Internet to find the culture knowledge related to the textbook and prepare the detailed culture resource, offering moderate relevant supplement about traditional Chinese culture. These supplement of culture can make up for the textbook, guiding students to enjoy traditional Chinese culture and participate in

transmitting them, stimulating student's interest in learning English and understanding excellent and elegant traditional Chinese culture. The students' horizon has been broadened.

### ***5.3. College English Teachers Should Try to Improve Themselves Actively by Learning***

First of all, college English teachers must update the concept of Education and teaching continuously and can keep up with the development to times. In the National Basic College English Course and Extended Course Seminar, Professor Shi Jian, former vice president of Sichuan University and doctoral tutor of Sichuan University School of Foreign Languages, pointed out that China's higher education faces a rare historical development opportunity, "building an innovative country requires plenty of innovative talents." Chinese universities should strive to "train a lot of high-quality innovative talents who are capable of independent learning, master critical thinking methods, and develop creative work habits". Only in this way can China remind in an invincible position in the future international competition. Therefore, college English teachers must update their educational and teaching concepts, focusing on the cultivation of students' innovative and intercultural learning abilities, emphasizing the breadth and depth of knowledge, stressing practical ability, and attaching importance to the reform of teaching methods. Teachers can adopt flexible and varied teaching methods and teaching strategies according to specific contents. By this way, culture teaching of college English will become lively and interesting, and easier for students to accept and understand. In English culture teaching, teachers should not only pay attention to the teaching of cultural knowledge, but also emphasize the cultivation of students' cross-cultural communication competence and the ability of transmitting excellent culture by integrating elegant traditional Chinese. Language is an important skill, but also a tool of thinking and a carrier of culture. Through the experiential learning, the students learn the beauty of language, improve their language skills, then thus improve their overall humanistic quality. In English teaching, teachers should teach with thinking, converse their roles, inject humanistic spirit into the English classroom, and cultivate students' critical thinking ability.

## **6. Conclusions**

College English is required course of Non-English majors. It is not only a basic course to learn language, but also to expand knowledge and know global cultures. College English is a tool with cultural connotation. It plays a very important part in the development of college students. Language belongs to culture and it reflects culture. There is close relationship between language and culture. The influence of culture on language is obvious. Culture plays an important role in the development of language. So college English teachers need to deeply understand the importance of culture, constantly enrich their intercultural knowledge, proactively change their teaching methods and set up a concept that language and culture is of equal importance. college English teachers should intensify the

awareness of integrating traditional Chinese culture into college English teaching, making the most of the resources of traditional Chinese culture in teaching and try to improve themselves actively by learning. College English teachers' competence of integrating traditional Chinese culture into college English teaching should be promoted frequently and continuously. Traditional Chinese culture is so elegant that it is the duty of college English teachers to transmit excellent traditional Chinese culture by integrating traditional Chinese culture into college English teaching actively.

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