

A Pedagogical Study on Integrating Canton Enamel Intangible Cultural Heritage into College English Instruction from the Perspective of Cultural Identity Construction

Lei Yang

Guangzhou College of Commerce, Guangzhou, Guangdong 511363

ABSTRACT

In response to the national initiative of integrating traditional culture into education, this study explores how *Canton Enamel* (*Guangcai*)—an intangible cultural heritage (ICH) from Lingnan—can be incorporated into college English instruction from the perspective of cultural identity construction. Adopting an action research design, 108 students were assigned to experimental and control groups. Four thematic teaching modules were implemented, emphasizing the integration of language and culture. Data collected from questionnaires, interviews, and learning assessments indicated that the inclusion of Canton Enamel content significantly improved students' cultural awareness, English proficiency, and learning motivation. The findings suggest that local ICH can serve as a valuable pedagogical resource for fostering cross-cultural communication skills and enhancing students' cultural identity through contextualized English learning.

KEYWORDS

Canton Enamel; Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH); Cultural Identity Construction; College English Instruction; Task-Based Teaching

With the continuous implementation of the national policy promoting the integration of excellent traditional Chinese culture into textbooks, classrooms, and students' minds, the fusion of language and culture in college foreign language education has become a central focus of curricular reform. As a nationally recognized item of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) from the Lingnan region, Canton Enamel embodies both aesthetic sophistication and deep symbolic meaning. Integrating this cultural element into college English instruction not only fosters students' cultural confidence but also enhances their intrinsic motivation for language learning.

However, traditional college English instruction has long prioritized linguistic skills and Anglo-American cultural content, often overlooking students' ability to understand, internalize, and articulate their native culture. This disconnection has limited the development of students' intercultural competence and cultural expression.

Guided by the perspective of cultural identity construction, this study explores the pedagogical value of integrating Canton Enamel into English instruction as a meaningful cultural input. Through task-based instructional design, the study examines how localized cultural content can be effectively embedded into college English teaching and evaluates its impact on students' language proficiency and cultural identity development. Ultimately, it aims to empower students to express Chinese cultural narratives in English and to cultivate culturally grounded communicative competence in a globalized context—laying a communicative foundation for the international dissemination of Chinese culture.

1 Research Background and Theoretical Foundation

(1) Policy-Driven Integration of Traditional Chinese Culture into College English Classrooms

In recent years, the Chinese government has placed increasing emphasis on the inheritance and promotion of traditional Chinese culture, explicitly advocating for its integration “into textbooks, into classrooms, and into students' minds.” This policy directive offers strategic guidance for embedding cultural content into higher education curricula.

As a core component of general education, college English is expected not only to develop students' language proficiency but also to fulfill the dual mission of enhancing cross-cultural communication skills and cultivating value-based awareness. However, college English instruction has traditionally centered on Anglo-American linguistic models and cultural content, often neglecting students' understanding of and ability to express their own cultural heritage. This cultural disconnect and lack of output capacity have become major barriers to effective intercultural communication.

Therefore, the integration of ICH into college English courses aligns with national priorities and supports the development of culturally distinctive language curricula—an approach echoed in recent studies emphasizing its role in fostering both language skills and cultural confidence (Lan, 2025).

(2) Educational Value and Identity-Building Potential of Canton Enamel as Intangible Cultural Heritage

As a nationally recognized form of intangible cultural heritage, Canton Enamel represents a distinctive manifestation of Lingnan ceramic artistry, combining traditional Chinese painting techniques with Western decorative styles. It holds

profound historical value and continues to exert international cultural influence.

Integrating Canton Enamel into English instruction can broaden students' cultural perspectives while using native cultural knowledge as a foundation for developing their ability to articulate Chinese narratives in intercultural contexts. More importantly, the craftsmanship, aesthetic form, and symbolic meaning embedded in Canton Enamel can elicit emotional resonance, recognition, and pride in Chinese cultural traditions, thus contributing to the constructive development of students' cultural identity.

Through both linguistic mediation and symbolic interpretation, Canton Enamel becomes a form of culturally embedded "comprehensible input" in English learning, capable of stimulating students' interest and cultivating their sense of cultural agency and mission.

(3) The Need for a Cultural Identity-Oriented Transformation in Foreign Language Teaching

Cultural identity is not an inherent or fixed essence but a dynamic and socially constructed process shaped through language, communication, and cultural interaction (Hall, 1990; Hecht, 1993). This theoretical perspective provides a value-driven orientation that transcends the instrumental and skills-based view of language education, repositioning it as a site for identity negotiation and cultural participation.

In the context of globalization, college students face the dual challenge of understanding others and expressing themselves, which requires not only linguistic competence but also cultural subjectivity. However, current college English courses often fall short in cultivating students' cultural expression skills and value recognition. Course content tends to be "externally rich but internally shallow," and teaching designs are frequently disconnected from local cultural contexts.

A transformation of English teaching based on cultural identity construction calls for the intentional integration of native cultural content into instruction. It aims to establish both cognitive and emotional connections between students and their culture, thereby supporting the parallel development of language ability and cultural awareness. This approach aligns with global perspectives on using ELT coursebooks to preserve ICH and foster cultural expression (Dündar & Sümbül, 2024).

(4) The Compatibility Between Task-Based Language Teaching and Local Cultural Integration

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) emphasizes the use of authentic, goal-oriented tasks to facilitate meaning construction and the contextualized application of language skills (Ellis, 2003). When integrated with Canton Enamel as an intangible cultural heritage (ICH) resource, TBLT provides a pedagogically viable framework for combining language acquisition with cultural learning. Activities such as English-language cultural presentations, museum-style guided tours, and demonstrations of traditional craft techniques serve not only to enhance students' communicative competence but also to deepen their cultural knowledge and internalization of Canton Enamel.

This "learning by doing" and "thinking through doing" model aligns closely with the "participation–identification–construction" pathway proposed by cultural identity theory, wherein students actively engage with cultural material, develop affective affiliation, and gradually construct personal cultural identity. As such, the TBLT approach supports both linguistic development and identity formation, offering a theoretically grounded and practically applicable model for embedding local cultural resources into English language education.

2 Implementation of Instructional Practice

(1) Dual-Core Curriculum: Language and Culture Integration

The English curriculum was restructured to integrate Canton Enamel culture alongside core language instruction. Four modules were designed to scaffold cultural and linguistic learning in parallel:

What is Canton Enamel – introducing its definition and artistic features ;

Canton Enamel's Global Journey – exploring its historical transmission and international influence ;

Telling Canton Enamel Stories in English – enhancing cultural expression ;

Design and Present Your Canton Enamel Product – applying language skills in creative tasks. Each module integrated vocabulary, communicative tasks, cultural comparison, and project-based learning. Additionally, "ICH Mini-Lectures" featured Canton Enamel artisans demonstrating their craft and providing students with authentic cultural input.

(2) Localized Resource Development

A custom English-language reader was compiled, featuring bilingual content on Canton Enamel history, terminology, and cultural context. Key terms (e. g., famille rose, enamel painting) were introduced through visuals and concise explanations. Supplementary materials included TED-style videos, documentaries, and international vlogs. Students also contributed personal insights and exhibition photos to enhance participatory learning.

(3) Task-Based Activities for Cultural Expression

Communicative tasks anchored language use in authentic contexts. For example, students designed English tours for a virtual Canton Enamel museum, wrote and presented essays such as Canton Enamel in the Eyes of Young Designers, and role-played as cultural ambassadors at a simulated "International Art Fair." These activities integrated language learning

with cultural storytelling.

(4) Multi-Dimensional Assessment System

Assessment extended beyond language proficiency to include cultural knowledge and expressive competence. In addition to oral and written exams, students were evaluated on cultural accuracy and intercultural communication. Tasks such as essays, tours, and reflections captured both cognitive and affective outcomes. Surveys and interviews offered feedback for iterative improvement.

3 A Comparative Analysis of Practical Learning Outcomes

(1) Significant Enhancement of Cultural Identity

Prior to the course, a questionnaire survey showed that most students had only a vague understanding of Canton Enamel as an item of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), with over 70% stating they were “unfamiliar” or had “heard of it but didn’t know the specifics.” In terms of cultural pride, students were generally more familiar with foreign cultural symbols such as Anglo-American films and festivals, while lacking emotional connection to native traditions—particularly the confidence and ability to articulate Chinese cultural concepts in English.

However, after one semester of implementing the “Canton Enamel in the English Classroom” program, students’ understanding and willingness to express related content increased significantly. More than 85% of students in the experimental class could clearly explain its craftsmanship, stylistic features, and cultural significance in English. In interviews, students frequently expressed sentiments such as, “It feels like a responsibility to introduce Chinese ICH in English,” and “Now I better understand what ‘cultural soft power’ means.”

This transformation—from unfamiliarity to familiarity, from passive observation to active participation—indicates that ICH, as a catalyst for identity, effectively fostered students’ re-engagement with and reconstruction of their native cultural identity.

(2) Simultaneous Improvement in English Expression Skills

Baseline tests at the semester’s start showed no significant difference between the experimental and control groups; both averaged at a lower-intermediate level. By the final evaluation, students in the experimental group improved by an average of 8 points in oral English and 7 in writing. Notable gains appeared in content completeness, coherence, and culturally accurate vocabulary. During presentations, students began to naturally use terms like “porcelain techniques,” “cultural fusion,” and “national identity.” Their language evolved from basic descriptions to more explanatory, narrative forms, integrating linguistic skills with cultural insight.

In contrast, although the control group made some progress, improvement was modest. Their output remained largely textbook-based, with limited cultural depth or personal voice. This contrast highlights how cultural integration not only boosts language utility but also enriches expression with deeper substance and emotional impact.

(3) Marked Increase in Learning Motivation and Classroom Engagement

Before the course, students showed little interest in discussing cultural topics in English and tended to complete tasks with minimal engagement. After Canton Enamel was introduced, students in the experimental group exhibited clear shifts in classroom behavior. They became more willing to speak, especially when discussing topics like “How ICH can go global” or “How young people can help preserve traditional art.” They articulated ideas using personal insights, independent research, and knowledge acquired in class.

Outside class, students showed further initiative. Many voluntarily uploaded English essays on Canton Enamel to the online platform and shared their experiences from exhibitions. Some participated in promotional video production, effectively transitioning from learners to cultural ambassadors. Teaching feedback indicated that over 90% of students in the experimental group agreed it made English class more engaging and brought them closer to the essence of Chinese culture.

This shows that integrating cultural content not only enriched the curriculum but also significantly increased students’ motivation and enthusiasm for cultural expression.

(4) Initial Formation of Cross-Cultural Communication Awareness

Analysis of students’ speeches and essays before and after the course reveals a growing awareness of “telling China’s stories to the world.” Initially, most students relied on Western perspectives, frequently citing Western celebrities and highlighting foreign cultural values. After the course, more began centering their messages on Chinese cultural uniqueness, actively expressing national values and ethnic identity. As one student stated in a presentation: “Canton Enamel is not only a type of porcelain, but also a living memory of cultural blending and resilience in China.” Such expressions transcend language practice, reflecting cultural articulation and value assertion, and signal the emergence of content-driven cross-cultural communication.

This shift was reinforced by student reflections. Many wrote, “I used to have no idea how to talk about Chinese culture in English, but now I’m confident, willing, and able to do it.” These responses suggest that as cultural identity deepened,

cross-cultural competence began to take root—a transformation with lasting value for global communication, international study, and future professional growth.

4 Teaching Reflections and Recommendations

(1) Preventing the Symbolization of Intangible Cultural Heritage Integration

Despite positive outcomes, the teaching practice revealed that some students maintained only a surface-level understanding of Canton Enamel, lacking deeper internalization of its cultural significance. Many limited their engagement to appreciating visual features or memorizing terms, without grasping historical context or societal meaning. In some cases, translation and presentation tasks were treated merely as assignments, devoid of reflection. This suggests that ICH integration should move beyond surface-level incorporation and instead be approached as a meaningful cultural inquiry. Through case analysis, role-play, and problem-based tasks, students can develop authentic cultural identification grounded in critical thinking.

To support this, teachers should design reflective tasks such as “How can ICH survive in modern society?” or “How can young people empower traditional heritage?” These questions guide students beyond basic descriptions toward interpreting, evaluating, and expressing cultural perspectives. In doing so, learners are encouraged to engage intellectually and emotionally, fostering deeper awareness and more meaningful cross-cultural expression.

During implementation, it became evident that Canton Enamel—as a visually rich, craft-based form of ICH—requires knowledge spanning history, art, craftsmanship, and cultural communication. Relying solely on English teachers to deliver such content and develop materials presents clear limitations. For example, during lessons on vessel types and decorative patterns, some terms were inaccurately explained due to the instructor’s non-specialist background, impairing student understanding and articulation.

To address this, universities should form interdisciplinary teaching teams when incorporating ICH into English instruction. English teachers can collaborate with ICH inheritors, design educators, and cultural communication faculty to co-develop bilingual, cross-cultural teaching resources and curricula. Institutions might also offer elective or micro-courses such as “ICH + English,” anchored in project-based learning, to support more integrated and in-depth instruction.

(2) Strengthening Digital Resource Development and Case Library Construction

During the course, Students often struggled with Canton Enamel-related English writing and presentations due to limited language resources and expression templates. Academic materials on Canton Enamel are scarce, while existing ICH-related English discourse is fragmented and lacks coherence. To address this, institutions should build localized, course-based resource systems, including a “Translated ICH Terminology Database,” an “English Expression Template Repository,” and a “Student Project Showcase Database.”

Universities can use teaching platforms or library systems to collect and organize multilingual materials, establishing a “Language Resource Center for the International Communication of Canton Enamel Culture.” At the same time, students should be encouraged to archive their coursework—such as videos, tour scripts, and translated brochures—into a dynamic, evolving “Student Case Database.” Such a system not only supports long-term instructional development but also aligns with recent research advocating multi-dimensional evaluation models in ICH-based English learning (Tian & Wei, 2025).

(3) Sustained Training and Expansion of Students’ Cultural Output Capacity

While students showed enthusiasm for cultural expression during the course, turning this into sustained and mature output skills requires a more systematic training model. A single English course cannot fully support the process of “cultural understanding → language transformation → intercultural communication.” Therefore, departments should integrate a cultural expression track into the broader curriculum to move beyond one-off projects toward long-term, staged development.

Courses such as “English Public Speaking for Cultural Communication” and “Translation and Interpretation for Cultural Transfer” can help refine expression skills, deepen cultural insight, and build cross-linguistic narrative ability. In parallel, universities can host co-curricular events like “ICH Promotion Speech Contests” and “ICH Exchange Dialogues with International Students,” offering real-world platforms for practicing cultural output. These initiatives promote a dual enhancement of language learning and intercultural communication, and gradually prepare students to act as cultural messengers capable of sharing Chinese heritage with global audiences.

5 Conclusion

Grounded in the framework of cultural identity construction, this study explored the integration and outcomes of embedding Canton Enamel intangible cultural heritage (ICH) into college English instruction. A comparative experiment

showed that this approach not only improved students' expressive skills but also deepened their recognition and promotion of traditional Chinese culture. The findings confirm that ICH, as a vivid representation of native identity, holds significant educational and intercultural value. It not only enriches English curricula with cultural depth, but also empowers students to articulate Chinese cultural narratives on global platforms—contributing to the broader goal of telling China's stories well in the world.

Funding

2024 Research Fund Project of Guangzhou College of Commerce: A Study on the Construction of Cultural Identity of Cantonese Intangible Cultural Heritage "Three Carvings, One Porcelain, and One Embroidery" from a Cross-Cultural Communication Perspective (Project No. 2024XJYB016).

References

- [1] Lan Y .Exploration of the Pathways for Integrating "ICH" into College English for Art&PE Majors under the Perspective of Cultural Confidence: A Case Study of "E English Course 1"[J]. Curriculum and Teaching Methodology, 2025, 8(3): 143-149.
- [2] Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. Opinions on the Implementation of the Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture Inheritance and Development Project. [EB/OL]. 2017. Available at: <http://www.moe.gov.cn/>
- [3] Dündar E , Sümbül M . Uncovering the role of English language teaching coursebooks in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage / Explorando el rol de los libros de texto de inglés para salvaguardar el patrimonio cultural inmaterial[J]. Culture and Education, 2024, 36(4): 942-969.
- [4] Hall S. Cultural Identity and Diaspora [C]// Rutherford J. (ed.). Identity: Community, Culture, Difference. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990: 222-237.
- [5] Hecht M. L. 2002: A Research Odyssey. Toward the Development of a Communication Theory of Identity [J]. Communication Monographs, 1993, 60(1): 76-82.
- [6] Ellis R. Task-based Language Learning and Teaching [M]. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- [7] Tian H ,Wei Y .Research on the Evaluation Mechanism of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Educational Tourism in Junior High School English Curriculum[J]. English Language Teaching and Linguistics Studies, 2025, 7(2): 75-78.