

Path and Practice of Integrating Traditional Chinese Cultural Theories into College English Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Based on the dual backdrop of the construction of "comprehensive ideological and political courses" and the digital transformation of education, the organic integration of traditional Chinese cultural theories into College English Teaching is an inevitable requirement for implementing the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education. As the most widely offered public basic course, College English possesses both the attribute of a language tool and the attribute of cultural communication, providing a natural carrier for the inheritance and promotion of traditional Chinese culture. Guided by traditional Chinese cultural theories and combined with the teaching practice of College English, this paper analyzes the existing problems in the integration of traditional Chinese cultural theories into current College English Teaching, including superficial integration, fragmented content, and simplistic methods. From four dimensions — teaching content reconstruction, method innovation, evaluation reform, and teacher competence improvement — it proposes a "theory-material-practice" trinity integration path. Taking the article *How Cultural Differences Shape Your Gratitude* as a teaching case to verify its feasibility, this paper aims to provide teaching references for cultivating new-era talents with cultural confidence, international perspective, and cross-cultural communication capabilities.

KEYWORDS

Traditional Chinese cultural theories; College English Teaching; Integration of traditional culture into courses; Cultural confidence; Teaching integration; Cross-cultural cognition

1 Introduction

The concept of "integrating ideological and political education into all courses" was first proposed at the National Conference on Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities in 2016. Subsequently, documents such as *Several Opinions on Deepening the Reform and Innovation of Ideological and Political Theory Courses in the New Era* and *Guidelines for the Construction of Ideological and Political Education in All Courses in Colleges and Universities* were successively issued, clearly requiring all types of courses to align with ideological and political theory courses and build a comprehensive education system. As a compulsory course for most non-English major undergraduates, College English has unique advantages such as a large number of class hours, a long coverage period, and extensive cultural exposure, making it an important platform for inheriting and spreading traditional Chinese culture.

At present, the important proposition of "deepening the study of China's civilized history and enhancing historical awareness and cultural confidence" has injected new theoretical connotations and era missions into College English Teaching. In today's world where cross-cultural exchanges are increasingly frequent, College English Teaching should not only be places for imparting language skills but also platforms for guiding students to establish a correct understanding of traditional Chinese culture and values. However, in practice, some teaching still has the phenomenon of "separation" between traditional Chinese cultural theories and language teaching: some simplify the integration of traditional cultural elements into the mechanical implantation of cultural slogans, while others are limited to traditional Western cultural content and ignore the excavation of local cultural materials, failing to give full play to the value-guiding function of language teaching. Therefore, exploring the path of in-depth integration of traditional Chinese cultural theories into College English Teaching and realizing the unity of knowledge impartment, ability cultivation, and value shaping through high-quality cross-cultural texts has become a core issue in the reform of College English Teaching in the new era.

2 Core value of integrating traditional Chinese cultural theories into college English teaching

2.1 Consolidating the ideological foundation of cultural confidence

The essence of integrating traditional Chinese cultural theories into College English Teaching is to guide students to establish cultural cognition and value identity in language learning. By integrating traditional Chinese cultural theories into teaching and analyzing the worldview, perspective on the world, social outlook, and moral outlook contained in Chinese civilization, students can systematically understand the core connotations of China's excellent traditional culture, revolutionary culture, and advanced socialist culture. When comparing Chinese and Western cultural differences, students can not only identify the characteristics of heterogeneous cultures through language texts (such as the self-focused nature of gratitude expression in individualistic cultures) but also clarify the unique charm and contemporary value of

traditional Chinese culture (such as the role of gratitude in strengthening social bonds in collectivist cultures), thereby enhancing national pride and avoiding the loss of cultural identity in cross-cultural contacts.

2.2 Cultivating international competence for two-way communication

Cross-cultural communication in the era of globalization is by no means a one-way cultural input; it requires equal value dialogue and cultural output. The integration of the concept of “mutual learning among civilizations” in traditional Chinese cultural theories can guide students to break through the cognitive limitation of “Western-centrism” and learn to accurately express the connotations and values of traditional Chinese culture in English. Taking cross-cultural text learning as an opportunity, students can conduct in-depth analysis of the differences in behavioral logic under different cultural backgrounds. For example, from the differences in gratitude expressions among children from different countries in *How Cultural Differences Shape Your Gratitude*, they can further discuss the contemporary connotations and international expression of China’s “reciprocity” culture. This kind of competence cultivation goes beyond simple language skill training, enabling students to upgrade from “being able to understand and express” to “being good at communicating and explaining”, laying a foundation for undertaking the era mission of “telling Chinese stories well to the world”.

2.3 Achieving the educational goal of all-round development

The core essence of integrating traditional culture into courses is to cultivate students’ comprehensive quality and sound personality. Integrating traditional Chinese cultural theories into College English Teaching can organically combine language learning with the cultivation of moral character and professional quality: by analyzing the cultural concepts of traditional Chinese culture in international exchanges (such as the concept of cultural inclusiveness in global governance), students’ sense of social responsibility can be strengthened; by interpreting the cultural stories and moral norms contained in traditional Chinese culture (such as gratitude practice cases under different cultures in texts), students’ correct outlook on life can be shaped; through discussions on cross-cultural ethical cases (such as the moral boundary of gratitude behavior in collectivist and individualistic cultures), students’ moral judgment ability can be improved. This integrated teaching method not only conforms to the humanistic attribute of language education but also responds to the demand for cultivating “talents with both virtue and ability” in the new era.

3 Practical path of integrating traditional Chinese cultural theories into college English teaching

3.1 Content reconstruction: building a “theory + material” teaching system

3.1.1 Concrete transformation of theories

Abstract traditional Chinese cultural theories are decomposed into perceivable teaching themes, and cross-cultural texts are used as a bridge between theory and practice. For example, the concept of “mutual learning among civilizations” in traditional Chinese culture is transformed into the language topic of “cultural differences and cross-cultural inclusiveness”. With *How Cultural Differences Shape Your Gratitude* as the core text, an analysis module on “the cultural logic of gratitude expression” is designed, accompanied by a three-dimensional analysis of “core theory (diversity of civilizations) - English expression (cultural nuances, interdependent/independent self) - cultural context (collectivist vs. individualistic cultural backgrounds)”. This enables students to understand the cultural connotations of “respecting cultural differences and promoting dialogue among civilizations” while learning terms such as “verbal gratitude” and “connective gratitude”, ensuring the simultaneous advancement of traditional cultural elements and language learning.

3.1.2 Diversified development of materials

A material library consisting of “classic texts + cross-cultural cases + local stories” is established. Classic texts include English translations of classic works of traditional Chinese culture (such as expositions on cultural concepts in Confucianism, Taoism, etc.), allowing students to understand the core ideas while learning authentic expressions; cross-cultural cases focus on foreign literature with cultural comparative value, such as gratitude practices in different countries in *How Cultural Differences Shape Your Gratitude* and international reports on the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese culture; local stories encourage students to record cases reflecting cultural inheritance around them in English (such as gratitude rituals in families and mutual assistance in communities), realizing “seeing the broad culture through small stories” and providing vivid carriers for the integration of traditional Chinese cultural theories.

3.2 Method innovation: creating an “online + offline” integrated teaching

3.2.1 Online preview: theoretical cognition stage

Traditional cultural themed preview resources are released on MOOC platforms, and learning tasks are designed around core cross-cultural texts. Taking *How Cultural Differences Shape Your Gratitude* as an example, English micro-courses on “cultural dimension theory” and a case library on “comparison of Chinese and Western gratitude cultures” are

pushed, and online thinking questions such as “Compare the differences in gratitude expressions between Chinese and American children and think about the cultural logic behind them” are set; themed debates on “cultural confidence and cross-cultural communication” are organized in the discussion area to guide students to initially perceive the theoretical connotation of “mutual learning among civilizations” based on the views in the text and activate their thinking on traditional Chinese culture in advance.

3.2.2 Offline deepening: language practice stage

A three-step teaching method of “text interpretation - situational simulation - project creation” is adopted, with cross-cultural texts as the link to integrate language training and traditional cultural education. In the text interpretation link, students are guided to carefully read *How Cultural Differences Shape Your Gratitude*, analyze the linguistic characteristics of gratitude expression under different cultures (such as “concrete gratitude” of American children and “connective gratitude” of Chinese children), and guide students to think about “equal respect behind cultural differences”; in situational simulation, tasks such as “gratitude expression in international exchanges” and “English interpretation of Chinese cultural concepts” are set up, allowing students to try to explain the cultural connotation of China’s “repaying a small favor with a great one” in English; in project creation, students are required to work in groups to create English PPTs on “comparison of Chinese and Western gratitude cultures” and write English reports on “local gratitude practices” based on traditional Chinese cultural theories.

3.2.3 Technology empowerment: immersive experience stage

Modern educational technology is used to enhance the interactivity and sense of involvement in the integration of traditional cultural elements. Based on the cultural scenarios in *How Cultural Differences Shape Your Gratitude*, virtual reality (VR) technology is used to restore “gratitude scenarios in different countries” (such as Chinese Spring Festival gratitude dinners and American Thanksgiving family gatherings), allowing students to engage in English communication practice in a simulated environment; AI oral evaluation systems are used to polish and provide logical guidance for students’ English expressions of “interpreting Chinese gratitude culture”, improving the accuracy of cross-cultural communication; online collaboration tools are used to organize cross-class English seminars on the theme of “cultural inclusiveness”, deepening students’ understanding of traditional Chinese cultural theories.

3.3 Evaluation reform: establishing a “process + result” diversified system

3.3.1 Process evaluation (accounting for 60%)

It covers teaching participation (20%), online learning (15%), and practical results (25%). Teaching participation focuses on the depth of students’ thinking on traditional Chinese culture in cross-cultural text discussions (such as their insights into “cultural differences and inclusiveness”); online learning tracks the completion of preview tasks and the quality of interactions in the discussion area (such as the depth of speeches on traditional cultural themes) through platform data; practical results focus on evaluating the traditional cultural connotations and expression effects of English works (such as the reflection of the concept of cultural confidence in the PPT on “comparison of Chinese and Western gratitude cultures”).

3.3.2 Summative evaluation (accounting for 40%)

A combination of “written test + oral test” is adopted. The written test adds a “theme writing on traditional cultural topics” module, requiring students to explain the practical significance of the concept of “mutual learning among civilizations” in cross-cultural communication in English from the theoretical perspective of *How Cultural Differences Shape Your Gratitude*; the oral test sets up a “cross-cultural scenario response” section, providing scenarios such as “international friends misunderstanding Chinese gratitude culture” to test students’ ability to clarify cultural misunderstandings and convey the connotations of traditional Chinese culture in English.

3.3.3 Diversified evaluation subjects

Student self-evaluation, group peer evaluation, and off-campus expert evaluation are introduced to form a comprehensive evaluation closed loop. Self-evaluation focuses on reflecting on “the simultaneous improvement of language learning and traditional cultural cognition”; peer evaluation focuses on the contribution to traditional cultural themes in the collaboration process; expert evaluation (inviting cultural studies teachers and foreign language teaching experts) focuses on the effect of cross-cultural communication and the achievement of traditional cultural literacy, ensuring the objectivity and professionalism of the evaluation.

3.4 Competence improvement: strengthening the “theory + ability” teacher reserve

“Letting those who understand traditional culture pass on traditional culture” is a prerequisite for the integration of traditional cultural elements. Colleges and universities should establish a regular training mechanism: on the one hand,

organize teachers to systematically learn traditional Chinese cultural theories and grasp the combination points between concepts such as “mutual learning among civilizations” and “cultural confidence” and cross-cultural teaching; on the other hand, carry out skill training on “development of traditional cultural materials” and “application of digital teaching tools” to improve teachers’ ability to excavate the traditional cultural value of cross-cultural texts similar to *How Cultural Differences Shape Your Gratitude* and their ability to translate local cultural materials into English. At the same time, teachers are encouraged to form interdisciplinary teaching and research teams, and work with cultural studies teachers and foreign language experts to develop teaching resource packages of “cross-cultural texts + traditional Chinese cultural theories”, solving the problem of “fighting alone” and ensuring professional support for the integration of traditional cultural elements.

4 Teaching case: the thematic unit of “cross-cultural gratitude and cultural confidence” centered on *How Cultural Differences Shape Your Gratitude*

4.1 Basis for case design

Centered on “cross-cultural cognition and cultural confidence”, this unit integrates the important connotation of “respecting the diversity of world civilizations and promoting mutual learning among civilizations” in traditional Chinese culture, and combines the teaching objectives of “argumentative writing” and “cross-cultural communication” in College English to design a three-class-hour traditional culture integration program. *How Cultural Differences Shape Your Gratitude* is selected as the core text because it covers cultural cases from multiple countries, which can not only meet the needs of language skill training but also provide a natural carrier for traditional cultural themes such as “cultural differences and inclusiveness” and “cultivation of cultural confidence”.

4.2 Implementation process

4.2.1 Pre-class preview (online)

Two parts of resources are released on the MOOC platform: theoretical materials include English translations of classic works of traditional Chinese culture on “mutual learning among civilizations”, and practical materials include the full text of *How Cultural Differences Shape Your Gratitude* and supporting micro-courses (analyzing the cultural dimension theory in the text). Preview tasks are set: first, mark the key words of gratitude expressions of children from different countries in the text (such as “verbal gratitude” and “connective gratitude”); second, think about the question “Compare traditional Chinese gratitude culture with the gratitude behaviors of American children in the text, and what do you think is the cultural logic behind the differences?” and submit a 200-word English opinion in the discussion area.

4.2.2 In-class deepening (offline)

- First Session (Intensive Text Reading, 40 minutes): Guide students to analyze the argumentative structure of *How Cultural Differences Shape Your Gratitude* and learn the English expressions of core terms such as “cultural variation” and “interdependent self”. By combining the cases of “connective gratitude” among Chinese and Korean children in the text, introduce the traditional Chinese cultural concepts of “courtesy calls for reciprocity” and “gratitude for favors received”. Guide students to summarize “the collectivist nature of Chinese gratitude culture” in English, so as to integrate language learning with traditional cultural cognition.

- Second Session (Group Debate, 30 minutes): Set the debate topic “Is connective gratitude more conducive to social harmony than concrete gratitude?” Students are required to argue their views based on the text cases (e.g., “connective gratitude” of Chinese children vs. “concrete gratitude” of American children) and Chinese social realities (e.g., community mutual assistance, family ethics). After the debate, the teacher gives comments and elevates the traditional cultural theme of “no civilization is superior to others; we should respect differences and promote mutual learning”.

- Third Session (Writing Training, 20 minutes): Assign an argumentative writing task with the title “Cultural Differences in Gratitude: Implications for Cross-Cultural Communication”. Students are required to take the text theory as the foundation, integrate the concept of “exchange and mutual learning of civilizations” in traditional Chinese culture, and explain in English how to respect differences in gratitude expressions and convey China’s cultural stance in cross-cultural communication. The teacher provides a writing framework (introduction - analysis of cultural differences - integration of traditional cultural concepts - conclusion) to guide students to transform traditional cultural connotations into standardized English expressions.

4.2.3 Post-class extension (online + offline)

- Offline Task: Students interview elderly people around them to collect “traditional Chinese gratitude stories” (e.g., neighborhood mutual assistance, teacher-student friendship), organize them into 300-word English essays, and mark the cultural values reflected in the stories.

- Online Task: Students upload their essays to the course platform for mutual evaluation, with a focus on assessing “the

accuracy of English expressions in cultural stories" and "the reflection of traditional cultural connotations".

- Supplementary Activity: Invite experts in cross-cultural studies to give an online English lecture on "gratitude culture and cultural confidence" to answer students' questions and deepen the learning effect.

4.3 Implementation Effects

After the completion of the unit teaching, an effect analysis is conducted based on multi-evaluation data and student feedback:

- Knowledge Level: 91% of students can accurately explain text terms such as "connective gratitude" and "interdependent self" in English; 87% of students can analyze the differences between Chinese and Western gratitude cultures based on text cases, showing a high degree of achievement in language skill objectives.

- Cultural Level: 85% of students accurately integrated the concept of "exchange and mutual learning of civilizations" in traditional Chinese culture into their argumentative essays; 79% of students demonstrated recognition of traditional Chinese culture in their gratitude story essays. Compared with the traditional teaching model, the achievement of traditional cultural literacy has increased by 38%.

- Student Feedback: 88% of students believe that "understanding traditional Chinese cultural theories through text learning is more natural" and "they can feel the importance of cultural confidence in language training". Students' resistance has significantly decreased, and their learning initiative has been notably enhanced.

5 Conclusion and prospects

The integration of traditional Chinese cultural theories into College English Teaching is not an additional requirement for language teaching, but a return to and enhancement of its essential role in cultural inheritance and moral education. By taking high-quality cross-cultural texts such as *How Cultural Differences Shape Your Gratitude* as carriers and constructing a complete system of "content reconstruction - method innovation - evaluation reform - teacher empowerment", we can effectively solve the problem of superficial integration in current teaching, realize the resonance between traditional Chinese cultural theories and language teaching, and help students establish cultural confidence and cultivate cross-cultural communication capabilities while improving their language skills.

In the future, with the in-depth advancement of educational digitalization, the integration of traditional Chinese cultural theories can be further developed in the direction of intelligence: big data can be used to analyze students' weak points in traditional cultural cognition during cross-cultural text learning (e. g., misunderstandings of "cultural confidence") to achieve personalized material recommendation; AI technology can be used to simulate more diverse cross-cultural traditional cultural scenarios (e.g., "interpreting Chinese culture in international occasions") to improve the pertinence of practice. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen inter-university teaching and research cooperation, jointly build a resource database of "cross-cultural texts + traditional Chinese cultural theories", and promote the sharing of high-quality teaching resources, so that College English Teaching can truly become an important platform for cultivating new-era talents with both cultural confidence and international vision.

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