



## Chinese traditional culture in high school English teaching

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### Abstract

In the new round of curriculum reform, the state and the education departments at different levels pay more attention to the cultivation of cultural literacy and cross-cultural awareness of high school students in English teaching, and put forward the concept of core literacy. Integrating Chinese traditional culture into English teaching is becoming more and more popular, which can promote the development of Chinese traditional culture and achieve the effectiveness of high school English teaching implementation. In this regard, this paper analyzes the necessity and significance of integrating traditional culture into high school English teaching, the current situation of the integration, the factors which hinder the effect of combination. In response to the analysis, some strategies have been suggested.

**Keywords:** Chinese traditional culture, English teaching, strategies

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### 1. Introduction

The Ministry of Education clearly stipulates that “the Party’s education policy should be comprehensively implemented, and Chinese traditional culture should be promoted”. Moreover, the General High School English Curriculum Standards suggest that “the core literacy of the English subject aims to develop students’ language ability, cultural awareness, critical thinking quality and learning ability”. Meanwhile, with the accelerated globalization, English has not only become the most widely used language, but also a tool for English-speaking countries to expand and penetrate into non-English-speaking countries in politics, economy and culture. Therefore, both from the perspective of English learners themselves and from the perspective of the current international situation, English teaching must be permeated and integrated with the learning of Chinese culture in order to enhance students’ awareness of native cultural self-identity and confidence. In the context of the new era, promoting the integration of Chinese traditional culture into the high school English teaching can contribute to the innovation of high school English teaching, make high school English teaching more cultural, promote the cultivation of students’ cross-cultural communication skills and cultural confidence, and achieve an effective mode of high school English teaching implementation. Besides, high school students should not forget their motherland’s culture in the process of learning English language and cultural knowledge, and be able to take on the important task of spreading Chinese civilization to the world. Our students will master proficient skills for international communication with enhanced Chinese cultural confidence and broadened international vision.

### 2. The necessity and significance of integrating Chinese traditional culture into high school English teaching

#### 2.1. Beneficial to the promotion of Chinese traditional culture

The over 5000-year history of China has accumulated excellent traditional culture, and until now, the excellent traditional culture still plays a great role in every field of China, especially an important foundation of China’s education essential for the development of the young people. For the socialist core value education purpose, we need to integrate Chinese traditional culture into high school English teaching. As a result, patriotism, national self-confidence and better moral education can be achieved among the students in the course of learning a foreign language.

Secondly, in the English classroom, a comparative analysis of the differences between Western and Chinese cultures can guide the students to realize the profoundness and advantages of Chinese traditional culture, which can help students have a deeper understanding of the native culture and facilitate the formation of their individualized thinking. As an effective way to carry forward and pass on traditional culture, English teaching should keep a balance the content between the Chinese culture and target language culture in addition to the English linguistic knowledge instruction. Then the students can have a deeper understanding of Chinese traditional culture, absorb the essence, and maintain correct ideology and values in the process of learning Western culture. Finally, they will be able to tell Chinese stories around the world in English, to enhance the influence of Chinese culture in other countries.

### **2.2. Improving students' intercultural communication skills**

Intercultural communication is the most important manifestation of students' ability to apply English in practice. Intercultural communication requires both strong communication skills and a deep understanding of the national culture in which the object of interaction is located. For example, as an excellent traditional culture in China, Shanxi drum music culture is incorporated into the English teaching system in a planned and conscious way by taking the path of traditional culture transmission, and promoting the integration of English information content with drum music culture, which can enrich the English information content through the educational path of students' knowledge and awareness of traditional culture. When students have a better understanding of foreign Chinese cultures, they can create a pleasant communication atmosphere in the intercultural communication and avoid communication misunderstandings which is due to regional and cultural differences. Because of the differences in national cultures, there are differences in the meanings expressed by the same vocabulary in Chinese and foreign cultures. If students have little understanding of both our culture and foreign culture, it is easy to use the wrong vocabulary or communicate offensively. Through learning the spiritual connotation of their own traditional culture, students can firstly master the correct expression of the language. In the cultural learning, students can also gradually recognize the cultural differences between different countries and different ethnic groups. Through the recognition and respect of different cultural differences, students can cultivate their cultural tolerance and open communication ideology.

### **2.3. Enhancing students' cultural confidence**

Cultural confidence is a firm message of an individual's full awareness and affirmation and recognition of the national culture. In the process of social development, students need to have cultural confidence which can point the way to students' future development. Based on this, in response to the problem of the lack of local culture in English teaching, some local cultures are integrated into English teaching, which not only optimizes the English teaching mode but also provides guarantee for the cultivation of students' cultural self-confidence, so that students can recognize English language information, British and American cultural information as well as local cultures in English teaching. In addition, in the comparative nature of culture, students can firm their own cultural beliefs, enhance their cultural self-

confidence and self-awareness, so as to better use English language information, promote Chinese excellent cultures.

### **2.4. Improving students' English level**

As a language subject, the study of English requires more than anything else that students have knowledge of our traditional culture and the construction of a complete system. Students are able to understand the language of Western culture based on the knowledge system of our traditional culture. First of all, the teaching content of English is mainly based on the British and American culture, but students rarely have the opportunity to experience the British and American culture, so they can only passively accept the teaching content in the process of learning English. The traditional culture of China is more familiar to high school students, and under the long-term influence of traditional culture, students have more choices of output content for oral communication, and have a sense of affinity and pride, which can stimulate students' interest in learning English. As we all know, interest is an important prerequisite for students to learn English and to improve their English proficiency. Secondly, through the comparison of Eastern and Western cultures, students can clearly understand the charm of our excellent culture and the essence of it. Students can recognize the differences of different cultures in the learning process, which can stimulate their desire to know more about the unknown and learn English better. Finally, in the context of exam-oriented education, most students do well in written English exams, but their ability to use the language is poor. Therefore, it takes a lot of time and effort for students to learn English well. Students' attitudes toward learning English are important, such as: interest, confidence, and courage to overcome difficulties all affect the effectiveness of learning. Incorporating traditional culture can greatly enhance the learning effect by developing students' courage to not be afraid of difficulties, confidence in learning English, and concentration in the learning process.

### **3. The current status of integrating traditional culture into high school English teaching**

As a language subject, the implementation and practice of teaching English has its own unique characteristics. Usually, high school English teaching should be educational in both knowledge and cultural integration, so that students can acquire both English knowledge information and cultural information in English learning. Thus, it is conducive to students' better output of English language information with the support of culture and enhance their English language output ability. However, in the current high school English classroom, teachers focus on developing students' language expression and writing skills and instructing them to learn about the humanities, customs and other social cultures of Western countries, but fail to integrate Chinese traditional culture into them, which is not conducive to students' cross-cultural communication, let alone spreading our culture through the English language. Secondly, the teaching concept of high school English is still dominated by the traditional teaching concept, and the implementation of this teaching concept emphasizes the teaching status of teachers and greatly suppresses the subjectivity of students' learning. And it makes the English teaching mode single so that students don't have the motivation to learn English. Finally, the large proportion of Western culture in high school English textbooks has caused high school students to know less and

less about Chinese culture, which is not beneficial to enhancing students' cultural confidence. Students are obsessed with improving their English oral communication skills and cross-cultural communication skills in English learning, ignoring the learning and understanding of their native culture, failing to draw nutrients from thousands of years of Chinese culture, which lead to the problem of asymmetric information understanding and even misunderstanding in Chinese and English communication. Therefore, integrating traditional culture in high school English teaching, realizing the docking of English teaching and traditional culture, and enriching the cultural heritage of English learners can not only help students master solid professional skills, but also help them build cultural confidence and inherit Chinese culture.

#### **4. Factors affecting the integration of traditional culture into the high school English teaching**

##### **4.1. Inadequate personal literacy of English teachers**

Teachers, as important players in the classroom, play a vital role in integrating traditional culture into high school English classrooms. However, most English teachers lack the awareness to integrate traditional culture in the classroom. Firstly, from the English teachers themselves, they are exposed to a large amount of excellent Western cultural knowledge and training during their own schooling, but their own culture is rarely exposed. As a result, teachers themselves do not have a deep understanding of Chinese culture and are unable to truly use English to convey Chinese traditional culture in the process of cross-cultural communication. Secondly, because of the mind-set, it is difficult for English teachers to consciously add traditional Chinese culture to their lessons according to the content of the textbook and students' needs. Thirdly, high school English teaching has a serious tendency to be test-oriented, and teachers are biased to teach from the textbook. In high school, a stage when students are under heavy pressure of schoolwork and time is tight, teachers often choose to teach only the content in the textbooks or in the college entrance exams in order to improve students' performance and complete the teaching tasks, while ignoring the cultural heritage of the teaching content itself. Fourthly, in the English classroom, most English teachers teach in a single, self-centered way, which greatly reduces the students' motivation to learn English and Chinese culture. Fifthly, the new standard textbooks are arranged in such a way that they strive to infuse culture into language use, presenting it mostly in a contextual way while providing a large amount of materials. However, in practice, most teachers only take students' mastery of language knowledge as the criterion, lack in-depth study of the content of the textbook, do not integrate it effectively. Some teachers even cut the content of the textbook drastically for no reason in order to complete the teaching schedule as soon as possible. Finally, in practice, most teachers stay at the superficial stage of language knowledge transfer, ignoring the deep cultural background and the differences between Chinese and Western cultures. Only with an understanding of the cultural differences can a language be truly used well.

##### **4.2 Less interest of students in Chinese traditional culture**

On the one hand, with a large amount of Western cultural input, students have an understanding of foreign cultures, which stimulates their learning strong interest in learning the

West; on the other hand, most English teachers teach English in a more homogeneous way in the classroom and do not pay attention to playing students' initiative, which greatly reduces students' interest in learning. In addition, with the development of network technology, a large number of western culture and ideology have been influxed into China, and various positive and negative information are mixed, which easily have negative influence on students. Students do not have a mature and complete world view, outlook on life and values, so under the influence of various cultures, their ideology and values have changed drastically. In the complex information environment of the Internet, negative cultural contents are more likely to have a chain reaction in the student. Meanwhile, students are interested in Western culture and lack identification with traditional culture, which brings extremely serious impact on the development of our traditional culture. Therefore, in the practical application of language, when students encounter knowledge about Chinese traditional culture, they are often unable to introduce Chinese traditional culture comprehensively in English due to insufficient knowledge reserve, which is what we call the "Chinese cultural aphasia phenomenon".

##### **4.3. Less content of Chinese traditional culture in the textbook**

The design of English textbook content is an important way to integrate Chinese culture into high school English classroom. Through the analysis of the textbook of Compulsory 1 of the PEP edition, we can see that two-fifths of the whole textbook design involves Chinese culture, introducing the Lancang River and the Tangshan Earthquake, but this is only Chinese culture. If we strictly follow the definition of Chinese traditional culture to measure the content of the whole book, there is no content about Chinese traditional culture in Compulsory 1 of the PEP edition. However, many current high school English textbooks are chosen to provide students with an English language environment, and the content chosen is mostly based on Western culture, with few traditional Chinese cultural contents included in the textbooks. Although high school English teaching needs to transmit English knowledge and English culture to students, and such teaching contents can achieve the knowledge and skill goals of high school English teaching, the emotional and attitudinal value goals of high school English teaching are neglected, and the lack of Chinese traditional culture will have a negative impact on high school students' emotional and attitudinal values.

#### **5. Strategies for Integrating Traditional Culture into High School English Teaching**

##### **5.1. Improving the personal qualities of English teachers**

The teacher is the organizer and guider of teaching activities, the leader of students, and plays a key role in students' learning. As the guider of classroom learning, the comprehensive quality of teachers determines the quality of teaching and the cultivation of talents. As the reform of English education in high school develops, classroom teaching has put forward higher requirements for English teachers, especially the introduction of traditional culture into classroom teaching. As the transmitter of English knowledge and culture, English teachers should firstly strengthen their self-identification with traditional culture, and through a deeper understanding of the culture can make better guidance to students' thoughts. The traditional culture education

concept will also have some influence on teachers' teaching methods and the design of teaching contents, so it is necessary for teachers to improve their traditional culture literacy. Secondly, schools should strengthen the management of teacher training, constantly improve English teachers' enthusiasm to learn Chinese traditional culture, and provide teachers with lecture training for in-depth understanding of it. Schools can organize teachers to watch relevant videos reflecting traditional Chinese culture, enhance the relevance of training theories and practical experiences, closely integrate the needs of participating teachers, carry out theoretical learning around the issue of integrating teaching practice, enhance the relevance of practical experience sharing, enable teachers to grasp the specific methods of integrating traditional Chinese culture and high school English teaching, and gradually improve teachers' teaching ability. Finally, with the higher requirements of society for talents with intercultural communication skills, the responsibility of English teachers to cultivate talents is more significant. In order to better accomplish the tasks of language teaching and cultural communication, teachers need to have the knowledge reserve of Western culture and traditional Chinese cultural literacy, and can introduce traditional culture into classroom teaching in a coordinated way to achieve the synergistic development of cultural knowledge. Teachers should constantly adjust and improve their teaching practice, strengthen their own intercultural communication skills and create a good English cultural atmosphere for their students.

### **5.2. Using information technology to enrich teaching methods**

The integration of information technology into English language teaching has increasingly shown great advantages, and there are many academic researches in this area. The use of information technology to promote the integration of high school English teaching with traditional Chinese culture is of great relevance. In order to better increase the depth of integration between information technology and high school English teaching, teachers should change their mindset and learn effective ways to use information technology, master the necessary information technology, and be able to apply it effectively in the teaching practice of integrating high school teaching with traditional Chinese culture. As teachers, we should be good at using information technology and using it to enrich teaching methods. For example, we are able to make the content of Chinese traditional culture into dynamic courseware for English language expressions, and incorporate videos and pictures in the courseware. Using information technology to teach Chinese traditional culture in the English classroom can stimulate students' interest in learning culture and increase their participation in the classroom. What's more, teachers can use information and Internet teaching technology to expand students' knowledge and help them understand Western culture and national traditional culture in a deeper way.

### **5.3. Focusing on the comparative analysis of Chinese and Western cultures**

Language is a carrier of culture, and only with an understanding knowledge of cultural differences can a language be truly used well. In the high school English classroom, teachers should not only tell students about the background of foreign cultures and traditional cultural

connotations, but also systematically compare and analyze two cultures. In the comparative analysis, students not only learn about Chinese and Western cultures, but also develop a sense of national pride and traditional cultural identity. For example: "Red" symbolizes happiness and good luck in China. During the Chinese New Year, Chinese people put up red couplets and red lanterns. However, in Westerners' minds, they always associate "red" with "violence and danger". Therefore, when teaching these words, teachers should not only teach their literal meaning, but also introduce their differences in Eastern and Western cultures. This not only gives students knowledge, but also enhances their enjoyment of learning the language.

### **5.4. Increasing opportunities for students to practice**

Foreign language learning ultimately comes down to language communication. For intercultural communication, culture is an integral part of it. As our country's international status improves, more and more foreigners are coming into China and into our lives. As a new era youth, we should learn how to introduce Chinese traditional culture to foreigners in English. Therefore, in the English classroom, teachers should design a certain amount of exercises and practical activities to let students put down their textbooks and encourage them to practice what they have learned in an oral communication way. Such oral communication exercises can improve students' oral expression skills, increase the practicality of English teaching, deepen students' impression of what they have learned and also help them form a correct cross-cultural awareness. For example, teachers can organize Chinese and Western culture knowledge competitions. This can provide opportunities for students to exert their subjective and creative action and then improve their intercultural communication. Therefore, we should make a whole-school effort to organize a variety of activities that integrate English and Chinese culture, relying on Chinese and foreign educational resources and community media, and combining school characteristics and students' realities. This is not only an effective way to improve students' practical English application skills, but also a more effective way to infuse Chinese culture education.

### **5.5. Increasing the proportion of traditional culture in high school textbooks**

The textbook is the main material for students to acquire systematic knowledge and study in school, which can help students master the content taught by teachers and facilitate students' pre-reading, reviewing and doing homework. At the same time, the textbook is also the main basis for teachers' teaching, providing basic materials for teachers to prepare lessons, conduct classes, assign homework, and evaluate students' learning performance. Therefore, it is important to increase the proportion of English textbooks about traditional Chinese culture and to screen excellent domestic and international texts so that high school students can learn about it through a new perspective in English. The infiltration of culture not only prevents students from missing out on their native culture, but also allows for effective cultural transfer and cultural comparison. Through the understanding and compatibility of different cultures, the real effect of learning English can be brought into play faster and more comprehensively. Students will be able to establish correct cultural concepts and have strong cultural confidence while facing foreign culture, so that they can better inherit and

promote the traditional Chinese culture.

#### 5.6. Increasing the proportion of Chinese traditional culture in the exam

In China, the college entrance examination plays a crucial role in students' entire educational career, and the content of the college entrance examination syllabus is the focus of teachers' teaching and, more importantly, students' learning. However, the content about Chinese traditional culture is given less weight in the college entrance examination papers, which results in Chinese traditional culture being rarely seen in English classrooms. If new content about traditional Chinese culture is added to the textbook, but it is not included in the scope of the college entrance examination, the probability that English teachers will teach it in the classroom is not too high, and it will not play a role in developing students' core literacy and cultural awareness. Therefore, increasing the proportion of traditional Chinese culture in the textbooks is the first step. Next, the college entrance examination should be adjusted accordingly.

#### 4. Conclusion

English, as a universal language, is inextricably linked to culture, and the two are mutually reinforcing. The integration of excellent Chinese culture into high school English teaching is both a need to expand the depth and breadth of students' English learning and a need to inherit and promote Chinese traditional culture. Therefore, English teachers should recognize the importance of the integration, and actively search for specific strategies. What's more, teachers should find the fit between Chinese traditional culture and the content related to high school English classroom teaching, so that students can increase their English knowledge and feel the inculcation of Chinese traditional culture at the same time, and improve their own literacy level. Thus, students can cultivate the spirit of science and humanism, stimulate the innovation and creativity of culture, spread Chinese culture, and enhance cultural confidence in the process of English learning.

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