

A Cultural Perspective Study on CIE Specialty English Teaching Mode

HAN Xiaoqiu^{[a],*}; XIAN Hongli^[b]

^[a]Lecturer, MA, School of International Cooperation and Exchange, Qiqihar University, Qiqihar, China.

^[b]Lecturer, MA, College English Teaching Department, Qiqihar University, Qiqihar, China.

*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

Chinese International Education specialty in Chinese higher education is nowadays confronted with some tough missions, especially teaching mode establishment of the specialty English as a second language. Based on cross-cultural communicative theories and built-in functional requirements of English teaching, we will in this article explicate the cardinal causes and ways of improving of the competence of the students of this specialty to express Chinese culture with English. Over two years' experimental teaching practice in International Cooperation and Exchange School, Qiqihar University of China, we are convinced, endorsed by our satisfactory feedback and teaching effects, that introducing traditional culture of China into English class is advisable, and the practice is also compulsory for the cultivation of bilingual interdisciplinary talents who will be committed to the development of the least prejudiced cultural exchanges and the transmission of Chinese culture with philanthropism and universal value. Therefore it is of great practical worth for foreign language teaching and global social significance of cultural spreading.

Key words: Chinese culture; Chinese international education specialty; Cross-cultural communication

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INTRODUCTION

Chinese International Education (abbreviated as CIE), as a comparatively brand new specialty in Chinese higher education, is nowadays confronted with some tough missions, takes an example, syllabus perfection, especially teaching mode orientation of the CIE specialty English as a second language. It is hoped that improvement can be made by means of reforms. Modern Chinese College students are found far lag behind in cross-cultural communicative competence in contrast to their native tongue. Therefore, the likelihood that CIE students, as future international Chinese language teachers, are poor in introducing the traditional culture of China for the learners from all over the world is supposed to be noticeable.

To keep in line with the teaching ideas of discourse communication studies, we should highlight the built-in functional requirements of English teaching in relation to CIE. Teaching staff is supposed to insist uniform stance dedicating to integrate English classes into the wholeness of the syllabus. Thus, the establishment of new teaching mode is not just a matter of departing from ABC of language study and push high students' competence of translation and writing on the usual level. To put it another way, the above-mentioned topic deserves a systematic project of CIE English teaching reform because this closely relates the cultivation of bilingual interdisciplinary talents and graduates committed to the development of harmonious diplomatic relationship between China and other countries and cultural exchanges and transmission.

1. REVIEWING RESEARCH STATUS

Reviewing the teaching situation of English specialty and College English opened for other specialties in China, we can note that since the 1980s, the introduction of functional communicative teaching approaches and the

rising of cross-cultural communications studies have exerted a surprising influence upon and also brought forth a series of issues for the English teaching practice and theoretical development.

Functional communicative teaching approach highlights the purpose of language teaching more than ever before, insisting that language teaching is to cultivate students' communicative competence with the target language. Besides language structures, everyday words and expressions of ideas and functions share the equal importance. As Hymes. D. has argued, language competence means properly using language in specific situations as well as the ability to make grammatical sentences. In the process of teaching, students play an active part which is regarded as one of the social functional elements of discourse they are practicing. The students' subjective ideas, attitude, emotion, and cultural background, and so on in the communicative context influence the choice and functional fulfilment of language forms. Therefore, the organization of teaching process should be student-centric and desalinize the manipulation of teachers. The role of the teacher is to provide communicative situations and occasions for the learners to express and exchange thoughts and ideas creatively and freely.

On the other side, the teaching practitioners have to arm themselves with brand new understanding on cross-cultural communication or inter-cultural communication, especially under the situation of growing international exchanges. In nature, cross-cultural communication refers to the communication between the native language users and non-native language users. In its broad sense, it also means the communication between people with different languages and cultural backgrounds.

Up to present, English teaching of different levels in Chinese colleges has broken through the limits of language system study and begun to attach importance to the target language culture and therefore many universities are devoted to introducing some foreign original edition textbooks and materials so that the understanding and knowledge of the culture of the English speaking countries have been furthered and deepened. In fact, this is the so-called cultivation of cross cultural communicative competence. However, some scholars contend over some limitations that though English is one of the international languages, we should still take into the consideration the expression of Chinese culture and culture of other non-English countries when students learn to use it. That explains why English teaching is in want of the voice of Chinese culture. In recent years, some investigations carried out by a number of famous universities' show that the Chinese college students' mastery of English unique to Chinese culture has displayed an embarrassing situation. Majority of the objects, even some postgraduates majoring in

cultural studies, are found weak or impotent in telling and commenting on Chinese characteristics culture in English. That fully demonstrates that Chinese culture has been obviously ignored in English teaching, and such is also the case in the CIE specialty.

In China, teaching theories studies of the CIE specialty, stemming from the specialty of Teaching of Chinese as a Foreign Language (abbreviated as TCFL), initiates in the early 1980s and takes the shape around the new century, but the detailed speculations and insights from the perspective of the CIE specialty is inadequate. Previous studies largely borrow the research achievements relating the college English, which, however, are universally opened for almost all students except English majors in one university. More than that, overseas studies of international Chinese teaching which was first started in the 1920s also upset the circle due to the vague orientation and decentralized arguments. This indicates that the study of the issue of CIE English teaching is immature and thus worth being noted.

As far as the textbooks selected in most Chinese colleges are concerned, most would like to take cultures of English speaking countries as the basic parts and units. By means of cramming, the teachers teach. The supreme objective seems to be students' passing the CET, a national English proficiency test in China. In the long run, the native Chinese culture is filtered out in the teaching materials intentionally or subconsciously. So teaching materials of CIE specialty is expecting updating in balancing English and Chinese culture and teaching approaches require corresponding changes since it can not meet the requirement of the pragmatic objective to bridge the cultural differences which are compulsory for the CIE majors. They should also keep watchful that they don't ignore or devalue the native culture and blindly worship others. To attain this goal, the objective and sensible attitude must be championed. Certainly, this confirms ultimately that English as a tool is learned only to express and promote Chinese culture and we should fully understand the significance and the urgency of the work.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF EMPHASIZING THE LINGUAL EXPRESSION OF CHINESE CIVILIZATION

Emphasizing the lingual expression of Chinese civilization is meaningful and significant. To begin with, that CIE English teaching should lead Chinese culture in is one of the basic requirements for the transmission of the oriental cultures and the improvement of the global peace. With the advent of the 21st century, Chinese comprehensive strength is getting rapid improvement. Therefore, to propagate and transmit Chinese culture in a proper way for a positive international profile of China as

a powerful nation is expected before the world, which will surely have immeasurable value for a rapidly developing China. Nowadays, Chinese culture is enjoying wide respect worldwide. And “Chinese culture fever” has kept a pleasing and interesting topic. We have every reason to argue that China has welcomed golden opportunities to familiar the world with her profound and unique culture. Some typical examples are those antique objects exhibitions with Chinese themes, “Chinese Culture Year” held in different countries as well as Confucius College in different regions and countries either run by Chinese non-governmental organizations or by host countries. This must be a beneficial attempt for the world peace. Just as what A. J. Toynbee has declared that traditional Chinese culture, especially the ideas of “Benevolence” and “Love without Distinction” contained in the ideologies of Confucianism, Mohism, can be the best remedy to deal with the civilization diseases of the modern society. Benevolence of Confucianism balances the misconceptions of the benefits in the competition for the individuals involved, whilst the ideas of Universal Love of Mohism stress more from the angle of the world peace. Therefore, humanistic culture of China will to some degree become one of mainstreams of cultural studies of modern times and in the coming decades.

“The East learning Spreading to the West” first proposed by Ji-Xianlin, a Chinese sinology studies master upholds that the process has experienced several thousands of years, and that is undoubtedly complementary to “the Western learning Spreading to the East” and therefore the global cultural exchanges are likely to maintain a fair development. That is also the reason why Chinese culture has made deep influence upon the cultures of other varieties. Correspondingly, English, not only Chinese the native tongue is one of the main tools to let Chinese culture know by the world.

At least 0.38 billions of people so far take English as the mother tongue, more 70 countries take it as the official language or semi-official language, and 1.6 billion other people speak English in this way or that. In contrast to this, Chinese Fever is still running high worldwide to the degree that 2,300 high education institutions in at least 85 countries have opened Chinese language courses, 31 millions of people learning the language. The populations registered in the HSK (The Chinese Language Testing System) grow at a remarkable rate, averaging almost 45 per cent per annum. Chinese language is becoming one of the main tools to spread Chinese culture. Nevertheless, Chinese can never replace the position of English language as a world language. Native Chinese culture still requires English to realize her popularization globally. Otherwise, if those who spread Chinese culture are less competent of telling Chinese culture to the world, then the voice of Chinese will get waned greatly in the multi-

dimensions of modern world. In this sense, English learning and teaching of CIE specialty are supposed to assist the voice of Chinese culture to be heard.

Second, English teaching of CIE specialty is one of the requirements for cross-cultural communication. Nowadays, international exchanges become frequent than ever before. Chinese English learners will unavoidably involve themselves in cross-cultural interactions at different levels. The consequence that inadequacy of Chinese cultural elements in English teaching will hamper the cross-cultural communications will reveal itself gradually. The typical case is such: a good number of well-trained young Chinese scholars who have studied English for years finally fail to show before people of other cultures his profound culture qualities and independent cultural character. Even embarrassingly, some MAs or Ph.Ds under Chinese English learning background is weak and shy in the context of English communication. To put it another way, the limitation or the lack of Chinese cultural foundation in everyday interactions will be partly responsible for the “Chinese Culture Aphasia”. That success of cross-cultural communication not only depends on the understanding, but also the two sides shared knowledge. To conclude, the talk between two cultures is interactive and equal, including exporting and importing, assimilation and dissimilation. Bearing in mind the one’s cultural identity is the prerequisite. From this sense, English users from Chinese context have to be aware of this point.

Thirdly, the introduction of Chinese culture in the CIE English teaching is one of the effective ways to resist the cultural interference and invasion. Nowadays, Chinese voice is not a dominant one as is agreed, however, confronted with the threatening siege and invasion of foreign cultures although China has realized rapid economic growth in recent 40 years after reform and opening-up in the 1980s and begins to display sustainable developing force and it still lack world class cultural products to represent the newly rising China and exert influence upon the world.

With the arrival of the globalization, China is open to the Western civilizations and their cultural values, moral worth, life style and philosophy of behaviour will change the life of Chinese people imperceptibly. To some degree, culture is a driving force equivalent of that of economy, politics and military. Without the impulse of forceful culture, physical civilization is not expected lasting long, to put it another way, virtuous development of Chinese culture as the soft strength is the way to fulfil self-improvement and inheritance. Confucius College is the channel to express Chinese voice. CIE students are the candidates of Confucius College and their cultural awareness and competence of expressing Chinese culture is weak and inadequate. This is where the point lies.

3. EXPERIMENTAL PRACTICE OF THE INTRODUCTION OF CHINESE CULTURAL CONTENTS IN ENGLISH TEACHING OF CIE SPECIALTY

3.1 Principles and Methods

Based on the investigation of prior knowledge of Chinese culture of the students of CIE specialty and the specific feedback, our program is attempting to establish comprehensive development strategy of Chinese culture introduction in English teaching of CIE specialty under the guidance of the theories of cross-culture communication and the fundamental principles of functional foreign language teaching approach, expecting that the in process of foreign language teaching of CIE, communicative situations be established to encourage and inspire the students from multi-channel and multi-level to deepen the understanding of Chinese culture and other cultures, finally learning to expressing Chinese with English in the proper way before the world. In this experimental practice, we will employ questionnaires, teaching experiments in the hope that we can solve the key problems of the balance of the introduction of Chinese culture and English culture in the process of English class, and second to that, the textbooks orientation and teaching systems will be discussed.

3.2 Experimental Procedures

3.2.1 Preliminary Stage

In the preliminary stage, we firstly conducted a survey on the Students' ability to translation and interpretation with English language of Native culture. We specially designed 3 tests and 3 questionnaires and issued to 192 students from 3 grades in Qiqihar university of China. After collecting and analyzing the information, we acquired a thorough knowledge from the following four investigations:

Investigation 1: Subcategories of Chinese culture first are required to be listed as many as possible according to the degree of familiarity and the degree to express with appropriate English. Basically, the types are as follows: Wine culture; tea culture; dress culture; traditional Chinese medicine culture; festival culture; the art of calligraphy; music culture; language culture; folk culture; ceramic culture; religion culture; silk culture; martial arts culture; architectural culture and others;

Investigation 2: Possible functions of English expression of Chinese culture listed according to the intensity they propose: Chinese teaching—passing the entrance exam of postgraduate or CET—carrying out some research activities (e.g. academic writing)—other uses;

Investigation 3: Ways of learning English expression of Chinese culture in students' eyes: bilingual textbooks and materials—original foreign edition works—English

translation version of Chinese works—other ways, such as classroom, broadcasting and TV Medias;

Investigation 4: Based on present interests, as for the English training and development in relation to Chinese culture the students most likely choose according to the frequency: dress culture; tea culture; ancient culture; architectural culture; food culture; religion culture; the culture of calligraphy; martial arts culture; drama culture; ceramic culture; all culture.

From the investigations conducted, we can conclude that the CIE students vary in the knowledge reserve of Chinese culture and corresponding English expressions. They don't even have an explicit knowledge of culture till they have entered the higher grade. Meanwhile, their interests are discrepant. As for the competence of English expressing, the current situation is less optimistic.

Also in the preliminary stage, three preparatory topics have to be clarified, that is to say, the issue of native cultural awareness and linguistic understanding, contents of Chinese culture to be introduced and Channels to be adopted.

As far as native cultural awareness and linguistic understanding are concerned, the basic questions require being answered. Language is one of the indispensable components of a particular culture; meanwhile culture is the condensation of language in some sense. Culture's influence upon language is essential and irreplaceable. Culture reflects the value system, world outlook, history, customs, living manners and society institutions and so on. In modern world, the diversity and evolution of cultures have decided that people's attitudes on the renewal of knowledge must be changed. In this sense, we can make breakthrough in cultural understanding and transmission. Chinese CIE students together with college students are lack of native cultural awareness and corresponding English competence. According to Wenzhong, H in 2013, cultural awareness can be generally subcategorized in into cultural knowledge, cultural understanding, cross-cultural communicative awareness and competence. However, with the growing opportunities of Chinese cultural exchanges and cooperation, more talents and professionals are in short supply. In the process of CIE English teaching, on the one hand, students can realize interests promotion and acquire cultural commonsense, on the other hand, they can learn to fill the drop height between Chinese culture and cultures of other kinds with their objective and appropriate judgment

Contents of Chinese culture which will be introduced to hold the parallel importance to the practice. Foreign culture studies and language teaching do not agree with full westernization or full adoption. Native culture introduction may cover sets of skills of communicative culture and culture of knowledge. Combing the two, the students learn to practice in real cross-cultural context. To be specific, we suggest that four aspects can be covered

in the course of the teaching. a) Cultural background knowledge closely related with the English texts. The typical related Chinese cultural contents will improve the students' awareness to properly use the two languages, understand the cultural differences. b) Implications of words. Meanings of words may be analyzed into inherent meaning, collocation meaning, and reflective meaning and so on according to semantic studies. To further, the semantics of one particular word is usually culture-dependent. In the English teaching, culture-oriented word study will explain the cultural functions logically and sensibly. Actually, without the support of social culture, linguistic symbols are nothing but a meaningless existence. c) Folklore culture. Customs and habits are unique in one people. The thinking ways, social rules and so on differs in many aspects. Folklore culture is the root of languages. d) Context of communication. As for any individual, he is expecting contextually and socially from the positive responses from the partners he is communicating with. Teaching activities should stress the context of communication and help the students with the understanding of appropriateness of language behaviors and forms.

Channels to be adopted can bring the supposition to the reality. Generally, students learn foreign culture mainly from classes, movies, and books. Conscious learning obviously enjoys a relatively high efficiency. Students want finely designed textbooks and friendly atmosphere to practice. Teaching language or say language learning, especially oral ability improvement should be conducted in everyday situations.

The first thing to consider is that students should be guided and encouraged to learn cultural knowledge through reading and other ways by themselves. In the teaching process, students are found weak in some in-depth discussion concerning specific topics though their fluency in daily English gets great improvement over a long period. This can be explained they are not prepared for themselves with the cultural accumulation, needless to say cultural expression. Therefore, teachers had best recommendation and provide some readings and booklist for the students.

Lectures on Chinese culture can be developed to spill the beans to the students. Target culture study takes culture as new forms of knowledge. By means of lectures of culture, culture visit and tourism, culture workshop, and so on, English study accompanied by the cultural contrast and analysis is conducted. Certainly, they are open and free, and therefore, can be complementary to the syllabus.

Teachers are also advised to introduce real and living materials. So the internet materials are one of the ideal options. Our teaching objective is to cultivate the students to exchange information with others. Once the authenticity is outdated or dubious, the efforts would become futile. In accordance with the language capacity, education

experience and interests of the students, teachers had better update their live language materials to ensure the timeliness, authenticity and practical values.

Additionally, teachers are supposed to introduce cultural elements by means of multimedia computers. Multimedia teaching means can help students absorb the new contents in a relaxing and direct way with music, images and sounds.

3.2.2 Strategies Implementation Stage

The second stage of the experimental teaching practice is to implement the strategies based the situation of the students and relevant theories. In this phase, corresponding syllabus of English courses for the CIE specialty will be established, in which booklists will be given to the learners in line with the requirements of the introduction of Chinese culture in the English teaching. Syllabus is something of a guideline, and details should be arranged and written into the documents and teaching schedules. Culture is inherent and coherent system, so the teaching process should take the fact into consideration so that the Chinese cultural teaching and English learning can be perfectly integrated.

There must some guiding teaching methods under the modern teaching theories and linguistics study. Comprehensively, we put forward three approaches. a) Theme teaching approach: Till present, CIE wants English textbooks to itself urgently. Besides, most Chinese public English textbooks are found unwilling to leave some reminders of Chinese cultural topics. From English classes, graduates feel hard to learn ways of English expressions and translation of Chinese things. Plus the lack of cultural awareness, they tend to weaken native culture, but stressing more language itself. So the teachers and students are both committed to select some themes of Chinese culture. No matter what websites to choose or the booklist to cover, the delivers and the recipients should be careful the theme they are doing. b) Situational performance approach: this approach requires teachers to create virtual reality. Role-playing will help the students experience and learn to solve problems or overcome the embarrassments and obstacles of cultural differences by using English. c) Multimedia teaching: fully applying the modern apparatus and systems, such as microcomputers, video apparatus, and so on, the teachers can display the cultural contents before the students in cubic and multidimensional forms. This can make up for the traditional teaching, transforming the abstract into the concrete, so that the non-intelligent elements will be activated. The students' interests and attentions will very likely shift to the new focuses. Meanwhile campus networks and autonomous learning centre of the foreign language should be utilized. Carefully selected movies resources should be uploaded for students. Based on the actual situation of teaching and students' needs, software, exercises database, journal articles folders should be

placed in the network servers for students to learn and discuss.

Admittedly, there still some extra problems worthy of notice. The introduction of mother tongue culture should be integrated into a reasonable system according to certain culture theories. As for the syllabus for CIE, teaching hours as well as teaching materials must be weighed and balanced in relation to other Chinese courses, such as Modern Chinese, Modern Chinese Literature, etc. On the other hand, teaching staff training is considered the critical link because they are responsible for the accurate interpretation or some comparative analysis of the cultural phenomenon covered in the teaching materials. In the past, in the process of culture teaching, there existed some arbitrariness without such a program guiding the students and teachers.

To solve the problem, we should start from two dimensions, namely, micro level and macro level. In the way of macro analysis, teaching should depart from the main plane of Chinese culture, covering Chinese values system, and thinking manners and so on. From the micro perspective, teachers can conduct some analysis of the cultural implications of the basic grammatical unit, say, with word and other basic component of language as the ontological unit. Synchronically and diachronically, comparisons and contrasts will trigger the sensitivity of culture in the learning subjects. With the increase of the mother tongue language and native culture, students can expect a balance development of cultural awareness so that to acquire a full view of cognition of bilingual and bi-cultural learning. And that will certainly benefit their future career as an international Chinese teacher with a neutral attitude or at least less prejudice as far as possible.

Regarding the amount of culture teaching and language teaching, it is required for English teaching of CIE be the seamless integration of cultural knowledge and language competence. For this reason, the general guideline should be put on the proper track, to be specific, teaching language of culture, and not vice versa. Culture is the distillation and exaltation of language. The focal points, channels and the amount of the introduction of Chinese culture should be adjusted to the competence development of the CIE students and the basic requirements of professionals' cultivation. It's not desirable to overstate the importance of whichever side, culture introduction or language teaching. The supreme pursuit of the introduction of culture in the English teaching is to scientifically and properly treat the relationship of language teaching and culture introduction so as to help

the learners with the establishment of an objective cultural attitude towards the cultures of different types without any cultural discrimination.

CONCLUSION

Over two academic years, the experimental teaching practice is conducted successfully in 9 CIE classes in International Exchange School, Qiqihar University of China, covering 262 students, 11 English courses. We are convinced the expectations for the students have been reached. By applying appropriate guiding principles, we have objectively and scientifically introduced the Chinese culture into English teaching activities. The native cultural awareness and confidence of the students are highly strengthened. CIE graduates get greatly improved also in expressing and transmitting Chinese culture with English language and thus have become even more competent in teaching international Chinese. On a large plane, the ideas and approaches of the comparative studies of language and culture will assist the modern college students with philanthropism and universal value, that is to say, discarding the narrow and prejudiced culture attitude so that they can, with a generous heart, strive for the harmonious coexistence of differences and corporate progress of peoples.

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