

An Empirical Survey of the Chinese Cultural Aphasia in University English Textbooks

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Under the text of Xi's call for "Chinese culture to go abroad" and the international craze for Mandarin, the article aims to reveal the relationship between college English textbooks and Chinese cultural aphasia, based on an analysis of a survey of a university in southern China. The specific research questions are: What is the attitude of English majors toward integrating English textbooks into Chinese culture? Do English majors have "Chinese cultural aphasia"? To what extent? Is there an imbalance between Chinese and western culture in College English textbooks? Through a test, questionnaire, and textbook analysis, a survey on Chinese cultural aphasia in university English textbooks among English majors was conducted. The research results show that English textbooks have a serious lack of Chinese culture; English majors have severe Chinese cultural aphasia; English majors have a positive attitude towards integrating Chinese culture into English textbooks, and they are willing to learn the English expressions of Chinese culture. The author believes that the study has the following practical significance: First, the statistics in the study offer a thought for textbook editors; second, the study can stimulate English teachers to cultivate students' cross-cultural communication skills; and third, research may inspire students to learn more about Chinese culture and enrich their knowledge.

Keyword: Chinese cultural aphasia (CCA), university English textbook, English learning

Introduction

Today, under the background of the "Belt and Road", the customs and cultures of countries and regions along the route are very different. Driven by Xi Jinping's cultural self-confidence, contemporary English undergraduate students should strengthen their cultural self-confidence and carry out cultural missions. It is well known that cross-cultural communication not only represents the absorption of foreign cultures but more importantly, it is also necessary to spread the unique colors of traditional Chinese culture. However, nowadays, most colleges and universities only attach importance to the input of foreign culture in English learning, but they despise the English expression ability of the homeland culture, resulting that in most college students, even English majors, cannot even come out a word in their mind when it comes to a homeland culture introduction in front of foreigners.

The present convey was conducted at a university in southern China. It aims at investigating the culture disproportion in college English textbooks and confirming the existence of "Chinese cultural aphasia" (CCA), exploring how to integrate Chinese culture into English teaching materials. The author intends to empower English teachers to pay more attention to students' ability to express Chinese culture in English.

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Literature Review

The review is followed by an introduction of "CCA" and the related foundations.

Due to the inequality between Chinese and English cultures in English language teaching, Chinese learners of English have some difficulties when they are talking about things which are specific to Chinese culture although they have a good command of English and English culture. In the field of Chinese English teaching, Cong (2000) first put forward the concept of "Chinese cultural aphasia" in response to this phenomenon. Since then, scholars have paid more attention to students' English expressions of Chinese culture, carried out an increasing number of researches on the phenomenon, and explored the corresponding solution.

The existing research on CCA can be classified as theoretical research and empirical research. Theoretical research includes coping strategies, integrating Chinese culture into English class, etc. Zhang, Liu, and Sun (2021) pointed out reasons and remedies for CCA; Wang (2020) discussed how to integrate mother tongue culture into college English classrooms effectively; Sun (2020) advocated increasing the proportion of Chinese culture in textbooks. Empirical research involves analysis of CCA in English teaching, research on English textbooks, etc. Ma (2019) studied the proportion of Chinese culture content in the *New Edition of College English Comprehensive Course*; and Zhao (2019) investigated the current situation of Chinese cultural English expression teaching.

In general, the research on Chinese cultural aphasia in university English textbooks has gained fruit. However, the research is still at an initial stage and entails further study.

Research Design

The author took a college in southern China for example. Through a test, a questionnaire, and textbook analysis, a survey on "Chinese Cultural Aphasia in University English Textbooks Among English Majors" is conducted.

Research Questions

The questions related to students are: What is the attitude of English majors toward integrating English textbooks into Chinese culture? Do English majors have "Chinese cultural aphasia"? To what extent? Is there an imbalance between Chinese and western culture in college English textbooks?

The first question includes two small questions: Is there a significant correlation between the current teaching situation and the English majors' ability to express Chinese culture in English? Is there a significant influence on the ability of English students to express Chinese culture in English by their attitude toward the integration of Chinese culture into textbooks and their interest in Chinese culture?

Research Instruments

The textbook analysis. The author takes *An Integrated English Course (Second Edition)* for example, searching for content related Chinese culture in the textbook. Besides, the author will analyze these content in various aspects (social identity and social groups; social interaction; beliefs and behaviors; social and political systems; socialization and life circles; national history; national geography; stereotype and national identity).

The test. The author designed a test for evaluating English majors' ability to Chinese cultural expression in English, which involves a catalogue of vocabulary translation and short sentence translation. This vocabulary encompasses various aspects, ranging from Chinese traditional culture, well-known literature, inventions both ancient and modern, current spirit, festivals, contemporary policy, famous architecture, Chinese ancient adages, etc. Besides, the author chose Chinese famous adages and hot topics for sentence translation. The full mark is 100, 2.5 score for each correct answer and 1 score for the answer with tiny mistakes.

The questionnaire. The questionnaire for English majors is composed of 19 multiple questions and two open questions, which cover the area of: (1) the interest and attitude of English majors in learning Chinese culture; (2) Chinese cultural English competence and problems of English majors; (3) the teaching of Chinese culture; (4) feedback from English majors in existing Chinese culture content in textbooks; and (5) attitude of English majors towards the incorporation of Chinese culture into college English textbooks.

The two open questions are: "What kind of Chinese culture do you want to add to an English textbook?"; "Do you think the distribution of Chinese culture in an English textbook directly impacts your ability to express Chinese culture in English and why?"

Results and Discussion

A Serious Lack of Chinese Culture in the English Textbook

Through an overall analysis, the author reveals that only one unit and two texts concern Chinese culture out of 14 units and 28 texts in *An Integrated English Course (Second Edition)*. There evidently is a severe imbalance of culture distribution. The author will analyze the cultural elements in the following.

"The Struggle to Be an All-American Girl", the first text, written by Elizabeth Wong, a Chinese American, describes the story of a girl, born in America, who tried to identify herself with American society, refused to learn her mother tongue, and failed because she could not change her cultural identity.

The major cultural element in the text is social identity and social group. The girl, the same as others, pursued her own social identity and tried to get involved in her social group, her American schoolmates. No matter how fast she can flip her lips, no matter how intense she hates Chinese culture, she still cannot get off her Chinese cultural identity, nor does her skin color.

The story exposes a sobering fact that happens to virtually all Chinese Americans who study in western schools, live in a Chinese family, and are ultimately confused about their cultural identity.

"No Name Woman", the second test, written by Maxine Hong Kingston, also a Chinese American, tells the story of Kingston's aunt on her father's side, who became pregnant by a man who was not her husband. The villagers in China were horrified at her behavior and raided her family's home and farm. She gave birth to her infant alone and then committed suicide and infanticide.

The text can be discussed both in beliefs and behaviors and stereotypes and national identity. The grief tale is portrayed in the western and Chinese ways. In the Chinese way, which was held by Kingston's mother, the no-name women betrayed the three cardinal principles which used to imprison and objectify women in that era and commit suicide with sin. In the western way, which was held by Kingston, the no-name women confronted the unjustified society and fate and protested violently against her and her newborn baby's death. The text shows a complete difference between western culture and Chinese in these years and tries to reshape the tragedy into a story fighting against unfair fate.

All the texts in the textbook talk about American culture; even the two texts discuss Chinese American culture. Thus, unfortunately, the textbook, used by English majors, has a grievous lack of Chinese culture.

Severe Chinese Cultural Aphasia Among English Majors

According to the data, students' English expression ability of Chinese culture is low, and Chinese cultural aphasia is a norm among English majors, because the average score of the test is only 29.53 and no one has a passing score of 60.

In the phrase translation part, only 12 out of 30 words were correct more than 50%, and eight of them are English to Chinese, which is the relatively simple one, which means only four out of 18 words (Chinese to English) are more than half right. The four words are "dumpling" (100%), "Dragon Boat Festival" (80%), "Journey to the West" (67%), and "Lantern Festival" (53%). These four words are the phrases they learn in primary school and junior high school, which means they virtually master new words of Chinese culture in college. Meanwhile, no one gets "2022 Winter Paralympics concludes" and "Carbon neutral" right. Most students have no idea about what "conclude" means here and what "carbon neutral" means.

In the part of sentence translation, most students gave up and some of them tried. Several students tried to use both literal translation and free translation. For example, one of them translated "Qian li zhi di hui yu yi xue" to "things will fail for details" which is close to the real meaning, but another translated it to "a poop do harmful to the porridge" which is not quite right.

Based on the analysis, the author has drawn some conclusions. First of all, the students' ability to express Chinese culture in English is generally very low and needs to be strengthened. Secondly, students' understanding of Chinese contemporary hot words in English is much lower than that of traditional culture. Finally, students have great difficulty translating well-known Chinese proverbs. Therefore, the author suggests that we should pay attention to the accumulation of Chinese hot words and the strengthening of traditional cultural English vocabulary when cultivating students' English expression ability of Chinese culture.

A Positive Attitude Towards Integrating Chinese Culture Into English Textbook

According to the data, the average "Attitude" is five (the highest score is six).

On the open question of "What kind of Chinese culture do you want to add to an English textbook", most students who answered tapped traditional culture.

On the open question of "Do you think the distribution of Chinese culture in an English textbook directly impacts your ability to express Chinese culture in English and why", a big part of the students who answered agreed with it and considered textbooks a convenient way to learn Chinese culture in English.

The results indicate that a large pool of English majors hold a positive attitude toward integrating Chinese culture into English textbooks and put forward several useful pieces of advice.

Willingness to Learn the English Expression of Chinese Culture

The author applied SPSS to research the relationship among "Interest", "Ability", "Teaching", "Satisfaction", and "Attitude".

The statistics show that "Ability" and "Teaching" have a significantly positive correlation ($p < 0.05$). That says, the better the current teaching condition is, the better Chinese cultural English expression skills students will have.

The statistics reveal that "Attitude" has no significant influence on "Ability" ($p > 0.05$), but "Interest" has a significant influence on "Ability" ($p < 0.05$).

On the question of “What troubles you most in expressing Chinese culture”, 67% of students choose “lack of language skill” and 25% of students choose “lack of relevant knowledge”. It shows that most students have a clear understanding of Chinese culture, but they do not know how to interpret it in English.

On the question of “How your college English teachers introduce Chinese culture”, 40% of students choose “compared with western culture”, 23% of students choose “in the optional course”, and 21% of students choose “arbitrary introduction”. It means that though some teachers introduce Chinese culture systematically, the majority of teachers pay less attention to Chinese culture.

Through the questionnaire, although the students are interested in Chinese culture, realize the importance of integrating Chinese culture in college English textbooks, and admit their low English expression skills of Chinese culture, in the college English teaching in China the Chinese culture is not given enough attention. Moreover, due to the pressure of examination and the lack of Chinese culture in textbooks, teachers are very limited in the relevant knowledge they can provide to students in the teaching process, and hardly take any methods to help students understand and master the content of this aspect in the classroom teaching process. In short, the absence of Chinese culture in textbooks and teachers’ insufficient attention to Chinese culture in the teaching process are important reasons for CCA.

Conclusion

First, through an analysis of Chinese culture in *An Integrated English Course (Second Edition)*, the author found that there is a serious lack of Chinese culture in the English textbook. Besides, the only two texts concerning China are talking about Chinese American culture.

Second, the test has proven that English majors have a severe CCA. Nearly all students in the test cannot translate famous Chinese adages and hot topics and most of them failed in translating Chinese hot words into English.

Third, it’s easy to find that most students have a positive attitude towards integrating Chinese culture into English text book via the questionnaire, though their college English teachers still have not paid enough attention to Chinese culture yet. Besides, the result indicates that a large pool of students is willing to learn the English expression of Chinese culture.

Based on the results of this study, the author puts forward the following suggestions for incorporating Chinese culture in college English textbooks:

First, adjust the proportion of Chinese culture and western culture in English textbooks, ensuring the amount of text related to Chinese culture is enough for students to improve their English expressions of Chinese culture.

Second, in terms of text content concerning Chinese culture, select foreign media reports on China or introduction articles of famous English documentaries, such as *Wild China*. In this way, students can learn Chinese hot words in English and English expressions of Chinese culture.

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