

# Research on the Phenomenon of "Chinese Culture Aphasia" of Non-English Majors Students and the Strategies

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## Abstract

Under the background of global economic integration, the phenomenon of Chinese culture aphasia has captured scholars' attention. Based on the questionnaire and interview held in North China Electric Power University, this paper expounds the causes of "Chinese culture aphasia", and proposes feasible strategies to improve it, aiming to improve students' ability and their comprehensive language literacy in cross-cultural communication.

**Keywords:** Chinese Culture aphasia; strategy; cross-cultural communication; Non-English Majors.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Culture is the cornerstone of the existence and development of a nation. The excellent traditional Chinese culture is an important cultural soft power and provides a strong spiritual force for the development of China. Just as the report to the 20th CPC National Congress points out: "We will stay firmly rooted in Chinese culture. We will collect and refine the defining symbols and best elements of Chinese culture and showcase them to the world. We will accelerate the development of China's discourse and narrative systems, better tell China's stories, make China's voice heard, and present a China that is credible, appealing, and respectable."

English, as a world language, bears the role of cultural heritage and ideological guidance. In the long-term English teaching, the lack of Chinese culture is a major defect in college English teaching in China. According to the survey, it is found that up to 90% of students cannot express Chinese culture accurately and fluently in English, which has led to the phenomenon of Chinese culture aphasia (Cong shan, 2000). According to CNKI database with "Chinese culture aphasia" as keywords, there are 606 academic journal articles. Since 2008, scholars' research on the phenomenon has been on the rise, especially after 2012, the average

number of published journal articles every year is about 51. Among them, 248 journal articles were published between 2017 and 2022, accounting for 40% of the total number of documents. It can be proven that the phenomenon of "Chinese culture aphasia" has gradually attracted the attention of scholars.

## 2. Research on "Chinese Culture Aphasia"

### 2.1 Respondents and Research Methods

The research group conducted a questionnaire on "The Phenomenon of 'Chinese Culture Aphasia' of Non-English Majors Students" through 151 non-English major freshmen of North China Electric Power University in November, 2022. The current textbook is "New Standard College English Integrated Course 3" published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. Another questionnaire plus interview was conducted among 8 college English teachers.

### 2.2 Research Results and Analysis

#### 2.2.1 Students' Feedback

The questionnaire focuses on three aspects: students' interest and mastery towards Chinese culture (Q1-Q2); students' study method about Chinese culture (Q3-Q4); how cultural elements are integrated into college English textbooks (Q5-Q6); students' cultural expression ability in life (Q7-Q8).

Q1.Students' interest in learning excellent traditional Chinese culture

Items	Number	Percentage
Strong interest	131	86.78%
Limited interest	11	7.42%
No interest	9	5.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>151</b>	

Q 2.Understanding towards English reading materials of excellent traditional Chinese culture

Items	Number	Percentage
Easy to understand	93	61.6%
Partially understand	43	24.5%
Hard to understand	15	9.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>151</b>	

Q 3.How do you learn Chinese culture ?

Items	Number	Percentage
In class	51	33.8%
Internet	73	48.3%
Extracurricular reading materials	17	11.3%
self-taught	10	6.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>151</b>	

Q 4.What is the effective way to improve the discourse power of Chinese culture?

Items	Number	Percentage
Increase the proportion of Chinese culture in English textbooks	59	39.1%
Set up optional courses on Chinese traditional culture	75	49.7%
Teachers' guidance on students' awareness of cultural discourse	17	11.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>151</b>	

Q5. Which aspects of Chinese culture do college English textbooks mainly cover?

Items	Number	Percentage
Philosophical culture	35	23.2%
Festival culture	85	56.3%
Art culture	31	20.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>151</b>	

Q6.Which Chinese elements do you think should be most integrated into college English textbooks?

Items	Number	Percentage
Chinese Confucianism	61	40.4%
Chinese diet	34	22.5%
Chinese Costume	11	7.3%
Chinese Customs	45	29.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>151</b>	

Q7. In the process of communicating with foreign friends, are there any situations which you are familiar with things but you cannot express in English?

Items	Number	Percentage
Often	72	47.7%
Sometimes	46	30.5%
Never	33	21.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>151</b>	

Q8: What's your comment on your English ability of introducing Chinese culture?

Items	Number	Percentage
Competent	66	43.7%
Limited competence	48	31.8%
incompetent	37	24.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>151</b>	

The results of the questionnaire indicate that most students show keen interest in Chinese culture (86.78%) and they can understand English reading materials (61.6%)(Q1-Q2). As network aborigines, they mainly rely on internet as their acquisition channel (48.3%). They hope to learn more Chinese cultures through textbook and they also intend to take some optional courses (Q3-Q4). During learning, students have covered philosophical culture, festival culture and art culture. Among the four elements, students think Chinese customs should be most integrated into college English textbooks (Q5-Q6).

Q7-Q8 shows that the current college students lack the ability to express Chinese culture in English due to deficiency of cultural input. It also finds that 89% of the students expressed their willingness to learn, which reflects that students have more consciousness to gain an international voice in introducing comprehensive and authentic Chinese culture.

### 2.2.1 Teachers' Feedback

There are four questions in the questionnaire.

Q1. Have you ever learned Chinese culture systematically?

Items	Number	Percentage
Yes	0	0%
Only cover some parts	5	62.5%
No	3	37.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	

Q2. Are you willing to set up an optional course concerning Chinese culture if given an opportunity?

Items	Number	Percentage
Yes	4	50%
No	4	50%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	

Q3. What is the efficient way to improve teachers' mastery towards Chinese culture? (Multiple choice)

Items	Number	Percentage
Watch Video, documentary and listen to audio	6	75%
Attend professional training	5	62.5%
Read extracurricular reading materials	4	50%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	

Q4. Do you think it is easy to integrate Chinese culture into college English teaching?

Items	Number	Percentage
Yes	6	75%
No	2	25%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	

From the above questionnaire and interview, it can be seen that only a few teachers have learned partially about Chinese Culture (62.5%), therefore, they are not so sure about their ability of setting up an optional course. However, teachers are trying hard to learn Chinese culture through different ways. It is acceptable to integrate Chinese culture into college English teaching (75%).

### 2.3 Limitations

For the questionnaire, only freshmen are involved in it. Students from other grades can be included in further research. Besides, most students major in science, ranging from computer, electronic information, to mechanics, which will also influence the final results.

#### 4. Analysis on the causes of "Chinese Culture Aphasia"

##### 4.1. The Objectives and Requirements of Personnel Training are not Specified, and the Curriculum Setting is not Reasonable

College English is the promotion and expansion of teaching in the basic education stage. The main purpose is to further improve students' English listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating abilities on the basis of English teaching in senior high schools. However, no specific requirements are put forward in the training objectives for learning Chinese cultural knowledge in English. In the course setting, the input and penetration of Chinese culture are ignored. The course setting mainly focuses on the construction of the curriculum system of basic general education courses, and only stays at the shallow level of ability

training. There is no systematic curriculum system consistent with the needs of the new generation, which restricts the improvement of students' cross-cultural communication ability.

##### 4.2. There is Lack of Content and Evaluation form about Chinese Culture in the Textbook

In *New Standard College English Integrated Course 3*, most of contents of the teaching materials are developed from the culture of western countries (Table 1). The convenient network resources make it easy for students to obtain knowledge related to British and American culture. However, the English version of Chinese literature, Chinese history and Chinese culture is quite limited, which hinders the cultivation of students' intercultural communication ability.

**Table 1: The Cultural Contents in New Standard College English Integrated Course 3**

Unit and Theme	Specific Articles	Cultural Territory
Unit1 Discover yourself	AR1: Catching crabs	U.S.A.
	AR2: We are all dying	UK&U.S.A.
Unit2 Childhood memories	AR1: The Glass Castle	U.S.A.
	AR2: Cultural childhoods	UK, U.S.A., Africa
Unit3 Art for art's sake	AR1: How we listen	U.S.A.
	AR2: The photo	U.S.A.
Unit4 No place like home	AR1: Golden memories	UK&U.S.A.
	AR2: No place like home?	U.S.A.
Unit5 A place in society	AR1: Dinner at Joanne's	U.S.A.
	AR2: I, We, they	UK&U.S.A.
Unit6 High days and holidays	AR1: Christmas Day in the morning	U.S.A.
	AR2: Chinese or Western, it's time to relax	U.S.A & China
Unit7 Streets full of heroes	AR1: Last man down: the fireman's story	U.S.A.
	AR2: Eleanor Roosevelt: First lady of the world	U.S.A.
Unit8 Tales ancient and modern	AR1: Urban myths or urban legends?	UK
	AR2: Echo and Narcissus	Ancient Greece

During the teaching practice, Chinese culture can be integrated according to the unit theme. But how do the teachers evaluate the teaching effect? According

to Table 2(below), only a small part of Chinese culture has been evaluated through the way of oral presentation.

**Table 2: The Make-up of Final Score of General English**

Final Score	Composition	Percentage
Formative Evaluation	Oral Presentation (10%)	30%
	Essay Writing (10%)	
	Class Performance+Quiz+Online Study (10%)	
Summative Evaluation	Oral Presentation (10%)+Final Examination (60%)	70%

##### 4.3. Teachers' Cultural Literacy needs to be improved

College English teachers should not only impart English knowledge and basic skills, but also spread English culture. Their own traditional cultural knowledge and expression ability, to a certain extent, determine whether they can deliver accurate and effective information to students. The survey found that teachers' ability to understand British and American culture in English is far more powerful than the familiarity with Chinese culture. Teachers need to

deepen their understanding about China's economy, politics, society, religion and other cultural knowledge.

#### 5. Strategies to Strengthen the Cultivation of Students' Intercultural Competence

##### 5.1 Build a Cultural Concept of Equality

Cultural confidence is the affirmation and inheritance of a nation's cultural system and values. Culture is related to the survival of the national spirit and is also a symbol of the national spirit. In fact, the phenomenon of Chinese culture aphasia is closely

related to the inequality in the spread of Chinese and Western cultures. This inequality also brings about inferiority complex when spreading Chinese culture. China is one of the four ancient civilizations with a long history of five thousand years, and its profound cultural heritage affects both China and the world. Therefore, Chinese citizens should hold firm confidence and national pride in Chinese culture, especially college students should shoulder the historical mission of learning and disseminating Chinese culture. The blending of Chinese and Western cultures is the premise and basis for cultivating students to establish a scientific, correct and equal cultural outlook. To treat the cultural differences between China and the West objectively, an equal awareness of cross-cultural communication should be established. Teachers can guide students to act as a practitioner and communicator of Chinese culture, spread China's voice to the world and tell Chinese stories well.

## 5.2 Clarify the Training Objectives and Optimize the Curriculum System and Teaching Materials

In addition to learning and exchanging advanced science and technology or professional information, students need learn about foreign society and culture, improve their understanding of different cultures, sense of differences and similarities between Chinese and foreign cultures, and cultivate cross-cultural communication ability. The personnel training program and curriculum syllabus for non-English majors should further revise and improve the personnel training objectives to adapt to the social needs. School authority also need to provide some elective courses for students to expand their knowledge fields, reform the curriculum system of cross-cultural communication, and optimize the curriculum. These courses may include *Introduction to Chinese Culture*, *Appreciation of Literary Works*, *Appreciation of Tang and Song Poetry*, *Appreciation of Calligraphy*, *Chinese Etiquette*, and *Appreciation of Fine Arts—Focusing on Chinese Painting*. Accordingly, some teaching materials which arouse students' interest need to be reconstructed and compiled.

## 5.3 Improve Traditional Chinese Cultural Literacy

College English teachers have played an important role to link in the communication between Chinese and Western cultures. It is very important to guide students to understand the cultural differences and cultivate students' ability to tell Chinese culture and Chinese stories in English, so that college students can not only improve their comprehensive English ability, but also enhance sense of national identity and cultural self-confidence. Therefore, teachers can adopt different ways to enrich themselves, such as attending the academic study through MOOC, browsing *China Daily* and *21st Century English News* every day, listening to Chinese documentaries in English and so on.

## 5.4 Integrate New Media into College English Curriculum

The results of the questionnaire show that Chinese college students, as English learners, lack knowledge reserves, cultural output ability and awareness when facing cross-cultural communication. To change this situation, integrating new media into the curriculum is an effective reform path. The research group tried two ways, namely, creating official account and building learning website.

### 5.4.1 Create Official Account

In order to conform to the habit of students' using electronic equipment and facilitate their learning, the research group provides a platform through official account for college students. From ancient times to the present, the content covers Chinese costume, food, traditional Chinese medicine, porcelain, etiquette, China's actions in dealing with major international health problems, China's landscape, Chinese elements in the translation of CET 4 and CET 6, cross-cultural communication and other topics, aiming to improve students' ability to express Chinese culture in English.

### 5.4.2 Build a Learning Website

English learning websites can provide more rich and diverse resources, including text, audio, video, animation, film and other multimedia information, mobilizing students' audio-visual and oral senses and stimulating learning interest. It can also provide space for independent learning. The website homepage divides Chinese culture content into traditional and modern parts, and encourage students to search the resources in the station. In addition, there are English proficiency tests and forums on the homepage. The former provides a platform for website users to test their ability about Chinese culture. The latter can be used for website users to communicate with others and learn from each other, so as to better improve and optimize their English learning results.

## 5.5 Reform the Evaluation Mechanism

According to Table 2, the limited proportion, which only takes up 5%, cannot guarantee the learning effect of Chinese culture. Teachers need increase the proportion of formative evaluation up to 10%-20% through student evaluation, peer evaluation and network evaluation. In the final written examination, proper proportion can be added in any part, like reading comprehension, translation, or writing. Through reforming the evaluation mechanism, students can learn Chinese culture more efficiently while teachers can check teaching effect.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In the report to the 20th CPC National Congress, the significance of culture is emphasized once again: "Without the prosperity of the Chinese culture, there will be no great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Every leap forward in human society

and every sublimation of human civilization are accompanied by historical progress in culture.” Under the background, college English education has played an increasingly leading role in the cultivation of cultural self-confidence and the promotion of "Chinese culture going global". The phenomenon of Chinese culture aphasia is becoming more and more serious. Based on the questionnaire and interview held in North China Electric Power University, this paper expounds the causes of Chinese culture aphasia, and proposes feasible strategies to improve it, including adding Chinese culture content, changing teaching forms, integrating new media and other means. Through these strategies, students are expected to enhance their cultural self-confidence and make contribution to the construction of China.

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