



Research Paper

Integrating traditional Chinese culture into senior high school English writing

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Abstract

In the current context of increasing cultural and economic exchanges between China and the world, adequate cultural awareness in both native and target languages has become an important element in the development of students' English core literacy at the high school level, since in intercultural communication, the long existing phenomenon of traditional Chinese culture "aphasia" reveals the absence of native language culture in English teaching in China. To solve this problem, some educators have tried to integrate traditional Chinese culture into senior high school students' English writing teaching. Teachers should be aware of the necessity and importance of integrating traditional culture in high school English writing from the cross-cultural communication and value education perspectives, study the aphasia phenomenon in the actual situation of teaching and learning, and then explore some feasible integration strategies of traditional Chinese culture in high school English writing teaching.

Key words: Traditional Chinese culture, senior high school English writing, teaching strategies

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I. Introduction

In the new round of China's curriculum reform, the General Senior High School English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition) condenses the concept of core literacy and demands the development of students' cultural awareness to facilitate students' adaptation to the current international multicultural development environment. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to strengthen cultural education in the high school English curriculum and enhance students' Chinese cultural awareness and upgrade their cultural confidence by combining traditional culture into English teaching. Writing is a main component of senior high school English education. As a productive linguistic skill, it is also a manifestation of students' comprehensive English proficiency level. Under the requirement of cultivating learners' core literacy in English, combining traditional culture in students' English writing teaching is of great significance to improve students' writing and develop their first language cultural awareness. However, the current situation of first language cultural absence in English writing of high school students, has already prompted English educators to consider the urgent need to

integrate traditional Chinese culture into English writing instruction and study and explore corresponding teaching solutions.

1. Problems faced by the application of traditional culture in high school English writing teaching

1.1 Teachers' neglect of the traditional culture infiltration in English writing

English teachers' educational philosophy and teaching ideas directly influence the direction of teaching practice and the development of students' core literacy of the English subject. At present, the influence of exam-oriented education and structural language theory are still deeply-rooted in the minds of many high school English teachers, and in their eyes it is crucial for students to express themselves correctly in linguistic knowledge in the process of writing and to get a high score in examinations, while the cultivation of students' cultural awareness is in a secondary position. Consequently, in this kind of learning environment of English writing teaching, high school students are accustomed to setting up demands on themselves from the linguistic point of view and lacking the awareness of actively exploring traditional culture. They do not have a profound awareness of the emotional native cultural value that should be presented in English writing in a cross-cultural context, resulting in mechanical and monotonous content in their English writing production with insufficient understanding of the cultural connotation.

1.2 Students' lack of accumulation in cultural knowledge

From the analysis of the survey of high school students, many students have limited cultural accumulation and relatively one-sided understanding of traditional culture, which makes it difficult for them to present their personalized views and ideas in their writing expressions in English. For example, the senior high school students usually have tight schedule and packed learning tasks, and they learn the traditional Chinese culture mainly in the classroom from the fixed teaching materials. The reading inadequacy in quality, quantity, depth and breadth is sure to result in poor internalization and weak accumulation of traditional Chinese culture even in Chinese. Therefore, in their English writing, their attitudes toward traditional culture is vague and unclear, and they even show the bad tendency of being presumptuous in cross-cultural communication. To address this, teachers should guide the students to read the traditional Chinese cultural content written in both English and Chinese to provide the students enough writing materials and independent ideas with rich Chinese cultural accumulation to better understand the target language culture.

1.3 Students' inadequate writing ability of Chinese culture in English

Integrating traditional culture into English writing will provide the students opportunities to master good English writing skills in expressing their opinions in an organized manner and improving the accuracy of their target English language with Chinese cultural knowledge with which they are relatively familiar. The following problems are commonly found in students' written works:

- i. the entry point is not accurate;
- ii. The content is simple and the ideas are not well-supported;
- iii. The structure of their composition is improper, lacking overall designing and clear hierarchical order of information.

These problems show that the students need to improve in both the English writing skills and the content of traditional Chinese culture, or rather the illogical structure of their composition is caused by the inadequate command of the necessary concepts and knowledge in Chinese culture. Teachers can design some writing tasks for students based on some certain specific content of traditional culture, providing pre-writing reading materials and scaffolding for their writing.¹

1.4 Monotonous way of integrating traditional culture in English writing teaching

At present, some high school English teachers have begun to explore the penetration and application of traditional culture in English writing based on the requirements of students' cultural awareness cultivation. However, they have few choices in the selection of teaching methods. They are used to imposing their cultural views on students by means of indoctrination and narration, which leads to students' lack of autonomy and makes it difficult for them to truly express their feelings and understanding of Chinese culture effectively.

1.5 Irrational evaluation ways of the students' English writing

The proper evaluation of traditional culture in high school English writing teaching is important for students to elaborate their cultural views and enhance their cultural awareness. However, in their feedback to the students' English writing, teachers lack analysis and judgment on students' expression of traditional cultural views and presentation of cultural emotions, neither do they pay attention to the students' self-evaluation. Consequently students might lose motivation to write about Chinese culture in English.

2. Integration strategies of traditional culture in high school English writing teaching

2.1 Changing the traditional teaching concept, and emphasizing the integration of traditional culture in English writing teaching

In the process of cultivating students' cultural awareness, to effectively integrate traditional culture to high school students' English writing, teachers should first change the traditional teaching concept of teaching mainly the target language culture, emphasize the importance of cultivating students' first language cultural awareness, and start teaching the students how to express the first language culture in English. The importance of cultivating students' cultural awareness need to be understood from the perspective of humanistic concept and their overall development, which includes not only their self-growth but also their advance in a cross-cultural context. Students are sure to interpret and think about traditional culture in the course of English writing, express their feelings and attitudes towards traditional culture, and then find spiritual support with their native cultural confidence in the cross-cultural environment. Secondly, high school English teachers should establish the concept of cultural infiltration in teaching, make full use of excellent traditional culture to enrich English language production, guide the students to compare Chinese and Western cultures, appreciate the deep emotional connotation contained in traditional culture, and develop a sense of cultural inheritance to promote the process of learning English language teaching. For example, when learning traditional customs and practices, teachers can combine Christmas and Chinese New Year to design writing tasks, guide students to compare and explore the values and cultural background of the festivals, recognize the diversity of cultures based on a thorough understanding of the most important festivals in the native and target language cultures, and raise the sense of responsibility to tell Chinese stories in English and spread traditional culture internationally.

2.2 Reforming the English teaching design to enhance students' traditional cultural literacy

The students are the main subjects of writing teaching in English, and they have a certain amount of traditional cultural accumulation which can serve as the basic prerequisite for their self-expression in writing. Various methods can be adopted by the high school English teachers to address the current problem of insufficient traditional culture accumulation among high school students so that students can use rich traditional cultural knowledge and positive attitudes to express themselves in writing and enhance their cultural awareness in cross cultural communication. For example, the traditional Chinese culture content should be combined in daily English reading instruction. In the teaching guidance of Cultural Heritage section in the textbook, teachers should guide students to browse and appreciate the cultural heritage around the world with the content of the textbook; and at the same time introduce the typical material culture and intangible cultural heritage in China to the students with the words, phrases and sentences structure the students have just learned from the text; besides, a recommended reading list can be provided for the learners to read after class to extensively dive into the articles related to China's cultural heritage to consolidate the accumulation of traditional culture, so that students can improve their cultural literacy through rich reading and provide cultural materials for writing about cultural heritage. In addition, teachers should pay attention to the guidance of students' emotional attitudes. For example, in the topic of Cultural Heritage, students are encouraged to take the initiative to think and express their attitudes towards cultural heritage in English language, so as to enhance students' awareness of protecting cultural heritage.

2.3 Teaching writing skills to enhance students' independent producing ability in English

Good writing skills enable the writers to express themselves at ease and pass their ideas and feelings to the readers smoothly. In practice, the problem encountered is usually that some students know the content and have the necessary ideas, but are unable to put them into readable English. Therefore in the practice of combining traditional culture to English writing instruction, they should strengthen the guidance of the writing skills to help the students accurately express traditional Chinese culture in clear and organized English. In the writing instruction, teachers should firstly allow the students some free space to experience traditional culture genuinely and develop true feelings in the contact and form the desire to express themselves. For example, in writing on the topic of **Festivals and Celebrations**, teachers can design a writing task for students based on the forms of traditional customs and specific ways of celebration in the East and West, and clarify the steps of writing such as

- i. examining of the topic;
- ii. Working out the ideas;
- iii. Outlining; iv. Drafting;
- iv. revising;

v. Final version etc, so that the ideas can be clarified and improved to form a coherent composition. Finally, teachers should pay attention to students' choice of words and phrases and organization of ideas. For the topic of **Festivals and Celebrations**, the best organizational pattern is comparison and contrast. The learners are encouraged to select similar festivals in Chinese and Western cultures for writing, focusing on the origin of

festivals, the main ways of celebration and cultural connotations etc. Teachers can provide the students some relevant reading materials and use brainstorming to help them to prepare the key words and phrases needed.²

2.4 Enriching English teaching activities to enhance the effect of English writing instruction

As cultural education is open-ended, teachers should design diversified practical activities for students in the process of combining traditional culture in English writing instruction in high school from multiple perspectives, so that students can develop the desire to express themselves and complete their English writing with authentic feelings and experiences. First, teachers can explore the traditional cultural themes in the English textbook resources, and then design cultural activities for students, so that they can explore and think about traditional culture and form their own opinions. For example, in the reading guide of *Morals and Virtues*, teachers can provide students with cultural learning materials based on traditional Chinese virtues, guide students to understand the various elaborations on ideology and morality in traditional culture, prompt students to think about the value of traditional Chinese virtues in the context of modern culture, and help the students to have their own expressions based on thinking and discussion. Secondly, a variety of extra-curricular cultural practice activities can deepen students' understanding of the culture and improve their expression of the corresponding culture content. For example, teachers can use famous people or events in traditional culture as lead-in, and ask the students to find more information about them in the extracurricular exploration, then the students will have their comments based on the historical facts and be willing to share them in classroom exchanges. In the course of exchanges and discussion, students may develop a further interest to think about and explore traditional culture on their own in the future.

2.5 Optimizing the evaluation of writing teaching to strengthen the integration effect of traditional culture

Teachers should give feedback on the blending effect of traditional culture in high school English writing teaching through reasonable and effective evaluation, analyzing students' writing works on the one hand, and motivating students to correct writing misunderstandings on the other hand. Then the students will be motivated to explore the ways of accurately telling Chinese stories in English in depth. In the evaluation of English writing teaching in high school, teachers should study the actual writing proficiency of the students in English, and then set up the corresponding evaluation indexes with the guidance of the requirements of students' cultural awareness cultivation to analyze students' expression of traditional cultural views with emphasis on the accuracy and innovation of students' views. Secondly, students can be gradually trained to evaluate their own English writing on Chinese culture. Students present their true feelings about traditional culture in their writing, so they have a certain right to speak about their own writing experiences. In the evaluation, teachers should encourage students to talk about the difficulties they encounter, break through themselves in understanding and expressing, and improve themselves in reflection and summary. Finally, to achieve a comprehensive and constructive evaluation effect, formative and summative evaluation measures should be combined to motivate students to write regularly and to improve their ability to express traditional cultural views in English.³

3. Case study: A writing task in English on Shanxi drum music

Shanxi is one of the cradles of Chinese civilization, and its drum music is well-known at home and abroad. Four schools of Shanxi drum music are found in the list of the national level intangible cultural heritage, and Jiangzhou Drum Music is included in the UNESCO's database of oral and intangible heritage of humanity. The ancient folk art has been dynamically inherited and very popular in local festival celebration and life rituals. English school teachers in Shanxi province can take drum music as an example, and guide the students to observe the drum music performance in daily life and study the drum music culture. Then they can design a writing task for the students to write about the drum music culture, a suitable task for the students to combine classroom learning with the real life situation. The scaffolding for this writing task can be the following:

- i. teacher's brief introduction to the drum music culture in Shanxi;
- ii. Chinese-to-English translation task of a short passage on drum music;
- iii. field investigation and document reading with pre-designed questions to help them;
- iv. classroom discussion for the students to share their ideas in English to prepare them for the structure and words and phrases for the writing in English

The students were very much motivated, and brought to the classroom different topics on Shanxi Drum Music: wedding drum music, festival drum music, introduction to a kind of local drum music, drum music legends, folk drum music artists etc. Here is one composition on Jiangzhou Drum Music.

Jiangzhou Drum Music---the Folk Art Treasure in My Hometown

My hometown is in Xinjiang County (ancient Jiangzhou), situated in the south-western part of Shanxi Province. The drum music there is well-known as Jiangzhou Drum Music. It was already in the national list of intangible cultural heritage in 2006, and the database of UNESCO in 2010.

The folk art has a long history of over 4000 years. Due to the geographical location of the ancient Jiangzhou Prefecture, it developed quickly in Qin and Han dynasties, and in Tang Dynasty it even became a part of national music because the first Emperor Li Shimin once stationed his troops there and won a great victory. In the following dynasties, drum music became favorite for the folk to worship various Gods and mark the special occasions in their life.⁴

In the late 20th century, the drum music notes scattered in the villages there were collected by the local art workers, and upgraded by some professional musicians. So the age-old folk music has become Chinese national art treasure. The drummers of Xinjiang have performed in over 30 countries in the world, becoming the Chinese cultural ambassadors. However, its vitality comes from the three dimensional space for the inheritance. Professional drummers often perform for the official occasions; The local people often invite a village drum music team to play at the weddings or business opening ceremonies. Drummers can be found everywhere in Xinjiang, either professional, or amateurs or even fans.

*This is an environment conducive to inheritance, and qualified young drummers will inherit the drumming techniques and pass on its culture. Xi Jie Experimental Primary School is well-known for its drum music teaching as extracurricular artistic activities. I had watched the pupils' rehearsal of the famous drum music piece, **The Prince of Qin Reviewing His Army**(秦王点兵). Although they were only part-timers, they played as splendidly as the professionals. The school drummers perform in Hong Kong and Macau nearly every year, and their instructor, Mr. Zhang Xinjun, was once invited to share his drum music teaching experiences on CCTV.⁵*

The deeply rooted art treasure from my hometown has rejuvenated and is still full of life after thousands of years. In the present rural revitalization of China, the beautiful drum music is playing a vital role in the rural cultural reconstruction, and as a representative of Chinese folk art, it has sent the friendship of Chinese people and the essence of Yellow River Civilization to people all over the world.

Of course, this is a revised version by the teacher based on the investigation of the student writer during her holidays. The teacher fixed the organization of the ideas and polished some of the sentence structure and choice of words and phrases in English in the student's first and second drafts. The student writer said she learned a lot about the drum music in her investigation, but her command of English was not good enough for her to describe the factual information and express her ideas.

From the student's self-evaluation, the teacher realized that the pre-writing scaffolding should include reading both traditional culture materials in Chinese and English, and the students should have a Chinese culture reading list in English, too., since they should know the culture content itself in Chinese as well as how to express it in English. Some of the revised version of the students' compositions can be put in the reading list, then the writers will be encouraged and motivated. The class English journal of Chinese cultural stories can be published periodically and edited by students in turn.

II. Conclusion

To answer for the requirements of English curriculum reform in the new era ,the need of development of students' English core literacy, and the country's call for course-based value education, it is necessary to integrate traditional culture into students' English writing. However, the long existing situation of native culture "aphasia" in English writing for high school students reveals teachers' lack of the awareness of infiltrating traditional culture and students' insufficient cultural accumulation and poor command of flexible expression skills in English. It is hoped that teachers take the initiative to change their conventional teaching concept, understand the significance of traditional culture in writing teaching in a cross-cultural context, and combine cultural education, writing skill guidance and scientific evaluation to guide students to take the initiative to express themselves. Therefore, the inculcation of traditional culture and skilled writing in English will enable the students to express their ideas and feelings of the traditional culture in English, implicitly develop their native cultural awareness, realize the objective of English subject based value education as well as strengthen the cultural quality for their English core literacy.

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