

The Project of “Chinese Culture Going Global” and Its Implications for College English Teaching in China

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Abstract—With the rapid development of China, the project of “Chinese culture going global” came into being in order to make people from other countries have a better understanding of China. However, both college English teachers and students in China suffer from “Chinese cultural aphasia”, and the majority of them are incapable of introducing Chinese culture to foreign friends due to the insufficient attention to Chinese culture teaching, the lack of Chinese cultural knowledge in most college English textbooks, college teachers’ shortage of Chinese cultural knowledge and the strong influence of the western culture on college students, etc. The project of “Chinese culture going global” has three implications for college English teaching: enhancing Chinese cultural consciousness and confidence of college teachers and students in China, enlarging English vocabulary concerning Chinese culture and enriching college students’ Chinese cultural knowledge; and improving Chinese college students’ intercultural communication competence.

Index Terms—the project of “Chinese culture going global”, Chinese cultural aphasia, intercultural communication competence, college English teaching in China

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the implementation of the reform and opening up policy in China in 1978, English as an indispensable tool in international communication has become increasingly important. It is no wonder English teaching has long attracted great attention at all levels of education in the past four decades in China, college English teaching is no exception. The initial goal of college English teaching was to help university students in China to understand the language and culture of the English-speaking countries and learn advanced technology from these developed countries. College English teaching has made considerable contribution to the development of Chinese economy in terms of developing talents proficient in English. With the increasing intercultural communication and growing economic strength of China, it is inevitable that Chinese culture is going global to help people from other countries understand China. Accordingly the project of “Chinese culture going global” came into being to meet the requirements of the development of the world as well as China. In contrast, there long exists the serious phenomenon of “Chinese cultural aphasia” at universities and colleges among college students. The project of “Chinese culture going global” sets new requirements for college English teaching, and college English teaching needs to adapt to the change to keep abreast with the times.

II. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT OF “CHINESE CULTURE GOING GLOBAL”

With globalization and the rapid development of China's economy, some foreign friends are eager to learn about Chinese culture out of curiosity or necessity. The fact that China has not due discourse right in the international world stage, and the Chinese culture is not widely recognized in the world may cause people in other countries sometimes have misunderstanding and deep-rooted stereotypes of Chinese people and culture. Under such a background, the project of “Chinese culture going global” was formally put forward by Chinese government in September, 2006 in *The Outline of the 11th Five-Year Plan*. Another major reason why China implements the Chinese-culture-going-global project is to increase cultural exchange and trade in the hope of changing the long-existing cultural trade deficit phenomenon. Consequently, all concerned institutions were encouraged to draw upon cultural resources and markets both at home and abroad to promote cultural exchange and Chinese cultural influence. *The Outline of the 12th Five-Year Plan* issued in March, 2011 elaborated the future enforcement of the project by constructing innovative ways to boost the international competitiveness of Chinese culture. Chinese president Xi Jinping stressed the project in October, 2017 at the 19th National Congress of the CPC that Chinese should cherish Chinese cultural roots while also drawing on other cultures. China shall improve its capacity for engaging in international communication so as to tell the Chinese stories well, thus presenting a true picture of China.

To sum up, the Chinese-culture-going-global project aims to promote intercultural communication, to help the world

better understand China and to strive for more discourse right, hence creating an international environment for China's peaceful development.

III. THE STATUS QUO OF COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CHINESE CULTURE IN CHINA: CHINESE CULTURAL APHASIA AND ITS MAIN CAUSES

The term of "Chinese cultural aphasia" was coined by Professor Cong (2000) originally to refer to the phenomenon in English teaching that quite a number of Chinese scholars engaged in foreign language teaching can't express Chinese culture in English in the course of communication with people from other countries, especially on the subject of the traditional Chinese culture. "Aphasia" is a medical term, which means the loss of thinking ability and language competence caused by injury or illness. Since the term was invented, the "Chinese cultural aphasia" has attracted widespread attention and generated hot discussion in the field of foreign language pedagogy in China. Zhang(2002) together with his colleague at Tsinghua University, are among the first researchers who make an empirical study on the phenomenon of Chinese cultural aphasia of Chinese college students. They conducted tests on 126 non-English majors in Tsinghua University about their English expression ability of Chinese culture. The contents of the test covered three aspects of culture: food, folklore and historical places of interest. The results showed that the accuracy of the English expressions was only 22.46%, 23.42% and 30.95% respectively. One point should be stressed that students of Tsinghua University are undoubtedly the top students from all parts of China as Tsinghua University ranks first or second among nearly 3000 universities and colleges in China. Other researchers from different universities also conducted a series of surveys and confirmed that Chinese college students do have the phenomenon of Chinese cultural aphasia, especially the ability to express Chinese culture in English is seriously lacking. (Liu, 2012)

The main causes of the "Chinese cultural aphasia" are as follows:

A. *College English in China Has Not Given Enough Attention to the Teaching of Chinese Culture.*

School education in China has long been criticized for being examination-oriented due to numerous social and historical factors, among which are the fierce competition, the pursuit of fair play and so on. Likewise we cannot discuss college English teaching without mentioning the importance of College English Test (CET for short), which is considered the guideline on college English teaching and learning nationwide. CET is devised and set by Ministry of Education of P.R. China, and held twice a year to this day which has a significant washback effect on the curriculum of college English.

College English Test Band 4/Band 6 (CET 4/6 for short) is the second largest scale national exam in China even today, second to College Entrance Examination. The purpose of CET is to accurately measure the English proficiency of college students of non-English majors in China. Undoubtedly CET4 and CET6 certificates are taken seriously because of its authoritativeness and wide social recognition, not only at school but also in students' future job hunting. It is not surprising that employers regard the CET certificate as an important requirement of new employee. Once a majority of colleges and universities refused to award college graduates bachelor's degrees unless they passed CET 4. CET has been playing an important role in promoting college English teaching in China, which motivates not only college students to learn English, but also motivates college teachers to do a better job as students' CET scores are seen as measure of the English teaching level of colleges and universities. Despite the positive role of CET4 and CET6 in English teaching in China, CET brings some negative influence on college English teaching as well. In order to help students pass CET4, many college English teachers have been using the examination-oriented teaching model which focuses on vocabulary, grammar, rhetoric and other linguistic phenomena. Quite a number of college English teachers spend class time on text explanation and translation, test skills development while forgetting the most important function of English study is not language per se, but intercultural communication. English culture is touched on as background material which helps the understanding of the English test papers, and Chinese culture has little place. As a result, English culture is not given due attention in college English classes in China, let alone Chinese culture. Since the first CET in 1987, CET has undergone changes in question types to meet the requirements of the times. It is not until December, 2013 that CET first added a new question type: paragraph translation on topics about Chinese economy, history, social development, culture and so on from Chinese into English, making up 15% of the total test paper scores. Since then, the learning of Chinese culture in college English class has been emphasized, but there is still a long way to go in spreading Chinese culture.

B. *College English Textbooks in China Do Not Contain Adequate Chinese Cultural Knowledge.*

Zhang (2002) once pointed out that teaching materials are one of the main causes of the phenomenon of Chinese cultural aphasia. Textbooks can exert considerable influence over what teachers teach and what students learn. Probably nothing influences the content and nature of teaching and learning more than the books and other teaching material used (Cunningsworth, 2002). At present, most of the current college English texts are adapted from English newspapers, magazines and other original reading materials, which mainly introduce society and life of English-speaking countries. These college English textbooks generally introduce the background information of the texts including knowledge of western culture, but few of them involve Chinese culture. Shortage of Chinese culture in college English textbooks results from the guidelines on college English teaching and the common assumption that as Chinese we should have

acquired the relevant knowledge at school or in life. The teachers' references on idiomatic English expressions of Chinese culture were not available for college English teachers. Li et al. (2007) analyzed three sets of most popular college English textbooks (*New Horizon College English*, *New College English* and *College English*), and found that the proportion of Chinese culture in the textbook material was only 6.25%, 2.5% and 2.9% respectively. Thanks to the positive backwash effect of CET in 2013, college English textbooks added translation passages of Chinese culture in revised editions, but the percentages are still relatively low in the teaching materials and the proportion of the Chinese culture and western culture is still in the state of imbalance.

C. Most College English Teachers in China Lack Systematic Knowledge of Chinese Culture

Generally speaking, the teacher is an extremely important figure and highly respected in Chinese culture as teachers play a very important role in the study and development of students. However, most college English teachers can't exert such influence on students in terms of Chinese culture in that they do not have systematic knowledge of Chinese culture themselves. According to the research of Xiao and other scholars (2010), who undertook the questionnaire survey on college English teachers in Shandong Province about their Chinese cultural knowledge, the results showed that their mastery of Chinese culture was unsatisfactory. The following reasons may explain why. China as an ancient civilization had suffered invasions since the Opium War in 1840, which led to the downplaying of traditional Chinese culture and the overemphasis of the advancement of western culture. Overemphasis on economic development accounts in part for the neglect of traditional Chinese culture and values. Higher education exhibited the same tendency of the downplaying of Chinese culture. Most college English teachers in China received master's degrees in English at colleges and universities which attached great importance to the understanding of western culture while neglecting Chinese culture. Such education emphasizes the introduction of western culture into China instead of spreading Chinese culture to foreign countries, which directly results in college English teachers' lack of systematic home country culture, and the corresponding English expressions are also limited, let alone imparting such knowledge to students.

D. Western Culture Permeates Chinese College Students' Daily Life.

As early as in 2002, African American freelance writer Wole Akande pointed out: "The aggressive spread of market economics and communication technologies---often under the control of Western multinationals---brings new challenges to local cultures and values in Africa and other non-Western societies." Chinese culture is no exception. As discussed above, the negation of traditional Chinese culture in modern China gave way to western culture which has gradually permeated in China. The reform and opening up policy in China in 1978 further contributed to bringing western culture and values into Chinese daily life. Western cultural infiltration also has something to do with the development of modern western economy and globalization, but the infiltration has been one-way for a long time. The long-term cultural trade deficit has made western culture pervasive: McDonald's, KFC and other foreign fast food restaurants have become ubiquitous in cities in China; Christmas, Valentine's Day and other western festivals have been widely observed by businessmen and young generation; Hollywood movies spread the values of individualism and materialism, which are previously associated with western culture. On the contrary, Chinese local culture has lost a lot of ground in this competition between the east and the west. College students are at the critical stage of life and are always more open to new cultures, so they have been the most-affected groups of individuals in introducing western culture. Therefore they are familiar with western festivals, lifestyles, music, the culture and customs of English-speaking countries. Ironically, they have little knowledge of the local culture of their own country, and English expressions of Chinese culture.

IV. THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROJECT OF "CHINESE CULTURE GOING GLOBAL" TO COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING

It should be noted that the project of "Chinese culture going global" is a long-term national project, which requires the collaborative efforts of the whole country, including the education departments and schools and institutions at all levels. As far as basic education and higher education are concerned, the related sectors should first define, sort out and classify the essence of fine Chinese culture that can easily get across to people from other countries at national level, and provide unified and idiomatic translations of the cultural products including literature, arts, movies etc. Equally important for the relevant sectors of education, especially higher education departments, is to draw up a cultural syllabus which combines English expressions and Chinese culture organically. Education sectors have already taken numerous steps to meet the requirements of the project of "Chinese culture going global" to this day. *The Outline of the National Medium-and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)* formulates clearly that the ultimate goal of Chinese culture education is to make students capable of intercultural communication, so that they can not only conduct academic exchanges, but also introduce Chinese culture to foreign friends. *The Guidelines on College English Teaching (2017)*, college English teaching syllabus in China, was made accordingly, which stipulates clearly the purpose of College English study: College students learn and master English as a communication tool to learn and exchange advanced scientific, technological or professional information, to understand the society and culture of foreign countries, to enhance their understanding of different cultures, to be aware of similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures, and to cultivate intercultural communication competence. In addition, college students learn English in order to use English to spread Chinese ideology and culture, and to promote the extensive

communication with people of all countries. In the broad sense, the project of “Chinese culture going global” has affected college English teaching in China. Specific implications the project have for college English teaching will be dwelled upon in the next part.

A. *Enhancing Chinese Cultural Consciousness and Confidence of College Teachers and Students in China*

Cultural consciousness and confidence is of far-reaching significance to enhance national confidence and identity, but it takes years or even decades to build up such consciousness and confidence. Fei Xiaotong (2005), a famous Chinese sociologist, pointed out: “Cultural consciousness takes arduous process. Only on the basis of understanding our own culture while experiencing many different cultures, can we have the qualifications to establish our own position in this emerging multicultural world.” It should be clarified at the beginning that cultural consciousness is not only the exploration and reconstruction of traditional Chinese culture, but the interaction and exchange with various cultures of different countries.

Any foreign language learning should be based on one’s own native language culture, otherwise a foreign language learner cannot have a thorough understanding of both cultures. As is discussed above, the strong influence of the western culture causes the college students, sometimes even English teachers in China inevitably to imbibe the western culture in the course of English learning, and their values, outlook and even the way of thinking can be affected to some degree. Some college students admit their wholesale adoption of the western culture. On the other hand, they do not identify with the native Chinese culture. It is high time to enhance cultural consciousness and confidence of local culture of Chinese college teachers and students.

Firstly, both college English teachers and students should have confidence in the greatness of fine Chinese culture. China is a large country with abundant cultural resources, and Chinese culture has a glorious history with more than 5000 years, which has been continuing till today. Secondly, both college English teachers and students in China should bear in mind the importance of Chinese culture in English teaching and learning, fully understand the requirements of The Guidelines on College English Teaching and our mission of telling the stories of China well and presenting a real China to the world. Thirdly, college English teachers should motivate themselves and students to learn Chinese culture by appreciating fine Chinese art and so on. English teachers may lead the students to have a discussion about the Chinese culture reflected by the latest blockbuster *The Wandering Earth*, a Chinese sci-fi movie with unique Chinese plot and themes. The idea of moving the earth instead of deserting it reflects traditional Chinese attachment to their homeland, in contrast to themes of exploration in western cinema. The use of collective efforts of professional staff worldwide to accomplish the major project of moving the earth presents comparison between individualism common in Hollywood movies.

B. *Enlarging English Vocabulary Concerning Chinese Culture and Enriching College Students’ Chinese Cultural Knowledge*

As we know from the above discussion, most college English teachers in China do not have systematic knowledge of Chinese culture themselves. The Chinese saying goes: To give the students a glass of water, the teacher should have a bucket of water. Here knowledge is compared to water and this saying implies that teachers should have a much better command of professional knowledge or expertise than students in order to do a better job. So first of all, Chinese college English teachers should develop the mentality of lifelong learning of Chinese culture, and make full use of teacher training, online resources to accumulate their own Chinese cultural knowledge, so as to influence and better guide students to learn Chinese culture. It is widely acknowledged that teachers serve as role models, and sometimes have far-reaching influence on students in many aspects.

Secondly, both college English teachers and students should consciously and purposefully develop the good habit of acquiring Chinese cultural knowledge. The more they appreciate the fine cultural productions, the better understanding they will have toward the wisdom of Chinese culture such as harmony, benevolence, inclusiveness, courtesy and so on. As college English textbooks in China do not include adequate Chinese cultural knowledge, measures could be adopted to solve the problem. To begin with, the proportion of Chinese cultural content should be appropriately increased, and the content of Chinese and western culture should be balanced. Next, college English teachers should supplement Chinese cultural materials with idiomatic translation to help students accumulate English vocabulary of Chinese culture and Chinese cultural knowledge, especially material about the topics of Chinese customs and festivals, tourism, geography, kung fu, food, language and Chinese characters, art that foreign friends are generally interested in.

Thirdly, English teachers should encourage students to read extensively in their spare time on Chinese culture, including some English novels written by Chinese scholars like *Moment in Peking* by Lin Yutang. English newspapers could also be recommended to college students such as *China Daily*, which aim to provide timely news of China and stories of Chinese to English speakers. Such extensive reading will expand students’ English vocabulary, enrich their Chinese culture, improve college students’ ability to express Chinese culture in English, and more importantly, help college students in China to stimulate the interest of learning Chinese culture.

C. *Improving Chinese College students’ Intercultural Communication Competence*

The World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (2015) made by ACTFL (the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) specifies five teaching goals for language learning (commonly referred to as the 5Cs):

Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. *The Guidelines on College English Teaching* (2017) issued by the Ministry of Education in China also defines one of the teaching objectives of College English as promoting intercultural communication competence. The project of “Chinese culture going global” shall not be accomplished without intercultural communication competence.

Nevertheless, as is elaborated before, college English teaching in China has not given enough attention to the teaching of culture, especially Chinese culture despite the fact that English education is supposed to be the main channel for the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence. For a long time, college English teaching in China focuses on the instrumental functions of English language and cultivation of English skills. In other words, the cultivation of English language skills is overemphasized and intercultural communication competence is neglected. Even if cultural teaching has been strengthened in recent years, the goal of intercultural communication teaching is limited to the understanding of western culture. Western culture plays an absolutely dominant role in college English syllabus, teaching contents and all kinds of examinations including CET.

Intercultural communication comprises a two-way interaction of participants, not one-way communication. This feature determines that in college English teaching, both the western culture and the Chinese culture should be given appropriate attention. Gao (1994) pointed out that, during the foreign language learning, learners' mother tongue level will be improved correspondingly as learners improve their foreign language proficiency. The understanding of native culture and the target language culture is mutually beneficial. So language learners' potential is fully tapped, which boosts language learning in turn. Furthermore, intercultural communication involves not simple cultural understanding, but more importantly, the cultural sharing and even the influence of communicative participants.

Liddicoat(2004) suggested four cultural teaching activities in the language classroom as “culture learning, culture contrast, culture exploration and the identification of third identity” between cultures. Guided by such principles, college English teachers can take the following steps to improve students' intercultural communication competence. First of all, college English teachers help students to learn culture in many ways as mentioned in the previous part. Besides culture learning, college English teachers should lead students to make comparisons between Chinese and western cultures, and guide students to appreciate the differences and similarities of different cultures, enhance students' cultural awareness, and eventually improve their intercultural communication competence. Next, college English teachers should encourage students to explore cultures by taking advantage of various online platforms like Facebook to make international friends to develop intercultural communication competence. Thirdly, college English teachers educate students to remain “third identity” and free their minds from preconceptions and stereotypes while conducting intercultural communication activities. Last but not least, college teachers should remind students the importance of empathy when telling Chinese stories to ensure Chinese culture going global. Berger(1987) defines empathy as “the capacity to know emotionally what another is experiencing within the frame of reference of that other person, the capacity to sample the feelings of another or to put oneself in another's shoes.” Briefly, empathy is the ability to understand and share feelings which are being experienced by another human being. We should respect each other during intercultural communication and find the common feelings and dreams as human beings for a better life, a better world.

V. CONCLUSION

The core of the project of “Chinese culture going global” is spreading the fine Chinese culture, enabling people from other cultural backgrounds to understand China more comprehensively, and creating a harmonious environment for China's development. Under the guidance of such a project, the goal of college English teaching in China can no longer be limited to understanding the culture of western society, but to make Chinese culture spread to the world. The focus of college English teaching in China should be shifted to improving college students' ability to use English in intercultural communication and of telling Chinese stories to the world.

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