



## A Tentative Research on Chinese Culture Integrated Into College English Teaching: Taking an English Optional Course *Dialogue With Chinese Culture* as an Example

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### Abstract

As Chinese international communication increases dramatically, Chinese cultural influence is growing considerably. Strengthening Chinese cultural education in College English teaching is in line with the needs of the times. In the course of College English teaching, to open Chinese culture optional course is intended to cultivate students’ intercultural communicative competence and spread Chinese culture based on English language learning.

**Key words:** Chinese culture; College English teaching; Dialogue with Chinese culture

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### INSTRUCTION

With the development of China’s economy and the promotion of its international status, as a result of more frequent exchanges with the world, China plays a significant role in more and more intercultural communicative activities. However, intercultural communication is characterized with two-way interaction, which not only refers to understanding the culture from

the other side of communication, but also contains cultural sharing and cultural influence on both sides, the latter being more important for the success of communication in some cases (Cong, 2000). Therefore, as one of intercultural communication parts, distinctively with Chinese cultural identity, Chinese people should not miss any chance to spread Chinese culture, creating Chinese cultural influence. As to the communication medium, English language, at present, is the first priority in consideration that Chinese language is comparatively less popularized and used worldwide.

Under the background of “culture going out” as national policy, integrating Chinese native culture into College English education becomes an urgent issue of the epoch. It was pointed out in *Guide to College English Teaching* (Wang, 2016) that foreign languages should be used to spread Chinese philosophy, academy and culture, and to open up the world market. Apparently, Chinese culture and English teaching are not in binary opposition, but inseparable. Integrating Chinese culture into College English teaching is a new mission for English teachers to meet the new demands.

In addition, Chinese Cultural Aphasia “phenomenon” among college students is still widespread. Because what students learn in English class is dominated by English language knowledge and culture, they can hardly acquaint themselves with Chinese culture expressed in English. There’s no doubt that college students convey Chinese culture in the hard way in intercultural communication. So Chinese culture input into English teaching at all levels of nationwide English education is an urgent task, especially for these college students, who are duty-bound to spread Chinese culture in possible intercultural communication after graduation. Furthermore, with the impact of multi-culture brought by globalization and information age, Chinese cultural identity of contemporary college students is greatly challenged. Chinese culture input and its integration with English teaching can also strengthen

Chinese culture belief and confidence in intercultural communication.

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## 1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

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According to cultural schema theories, cultural schema is the background knowledge about cultures, which is a knowledge structure established on the basis of personal cultural experiences. As Chinese native, college students have a certain amount of cognitive schema of Chinese culture. These known schemas act as stimulus by generating meaning in the expression. They provide meaning foundation in the process of expressing Chinese culture in English.

In the process of language output, for second language learners, there is a gap between whether they have something to express or not (Gap1, abbreviated to G1); there is also a gap between what should be expressed in native-like way and what they can express in their own way (Gap2, abbreviated as G2). In the process of Chinese culture output in English, Chinese college students can easily cross G1 on the assumption that the known schema of Chinese culture has been inserted in their minds. With this premise, it is the G2 that demands great effort to cross. In order to bridge the gaps existing in second language output, a research has been done and its findings show that lexical chunks teaching may promote students' speaking ability (Gao, 2016).

Lexical chunks teaching has been applied into college English teaching for a long time and its role and effect should never be neglected. In fact, many scholars (such as Bolinger (1976), Fillmore (1976), Pawley and Syder (1983), Sinclair (1991), Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) had already affirmed their existence and functions. Lewis Michael (1993), the founder of lexical chunks teaching, argues that language is not made up of traditional grammar and vocabulary, but a number of prefabricated chunks. They can be a word or a phrase, which can be used as a collocation, a fixed expression, and a semi-fixed expression. He stresses that when speakers use language to produce, their sentences are not generated by grammar, which works as a word organizer, but some chunks prepared in mind. Lexical chunks play a key role in making language output effective and efficient.

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## 2. PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

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Combining Chinese culture with English teaching has been aimed to cope with Chinese culture aphasia since this term was first proposed by Dr. Cong in *Guangming Daily*. Many scholars have been dedicated to improving the situation from both theoretical and empirical perspective, putting forward constructive and practical suggestions in the fields of teaching contents, teaching methods, evaluation system, teachers' cultural literacy, extracurricular activities and so

on. This research is carried out by means of opening an optional course: *Dialogue with Chinese Culture*, so as to explore the possible path of integrating Chinese culture into English teaching.

Ministry of Education (2006) announced in *College English Curriculum Requirements* that the goal of college English teaching is to cultivate students' comprehensive ability of using English, especially listening and speaking ability, so that they can use English to communicate effectively in the future study, work and social activities. Meanwhile, self-learning ability and comprehensive cultural quality are expected to be enhanced to adapt to the needs of China's social development and international exchanges. Speaking and listening abilities are in the spotlight and cultural quality in international communication is also clearly focused on college English teaching. To put all these essences together, to melt training students' speaking ability into Chinese culture teaching seems to be a good choice for the purpose of intercultural communication. This type of combination can not only meet the demand of improving comprehensive cultural quality, but also enhance the sense of national cultural identity. More importantly, college students will have the opportunity to use English language to express their own culture, so as to develop their communicative competence in cross-cultural communication. Therefore, the optional course in this research is called *Dialogue With Chinese Culture*, intended to spread Chinese culture on the one hand, and on the other, to cultivate students' speaking ability and cross-cultural communicative ability.

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## 3. RESEARCH ON THE STATUS QUO

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### 3.1 Design of the Research

The course is designed to spread some general knowledge of Chinese traditional culture by means of knowledge input as well as speech output. Undergraduates at any level can take the course only if they hold interest in Chinese culture spreading and have desire to enhance their English spoken ability. In the 16 weeks, 2 teaching hours per week, the students may globally learn parts of Chinese traditional culture, ranging from Chinese festivals, Confucianism, the great four inventions, calligraphy art, traditional Chinese medicine to operas, tea culture, Chinese food, Chinese Kung Fu, dragon culture, etc.. In each teaching period, lexical chunks like idioms, phrases, fixed expressions, sentence patterns, and lexical items would be summarized, laid out and then emphasized. Students are expected to use them to make a dialogue or presentation based on a Chinese culture topic.

At the end of the course, test 1, as a final examination, includes 10 items of general Chinese culture knowledge like Spring Festival, the Great Wall, and Peking Opera, the

first 5 in written form and the last 5 in spoken form. Test 2, as a questionnaire to collect feedbacks and suggestions, mainly consists of 10 questions, covering teaching goals, teaching contents, teaching activities (such as making dialogue, discussion, brief presentation, group work and role-play, etc.), teaching approaches (such as main points explanation, real scene playback, cultural difference comparison, critical thinking training, etc.), recognition of teaching effects, etc..

### 3.2 Data Collection and Major Findings

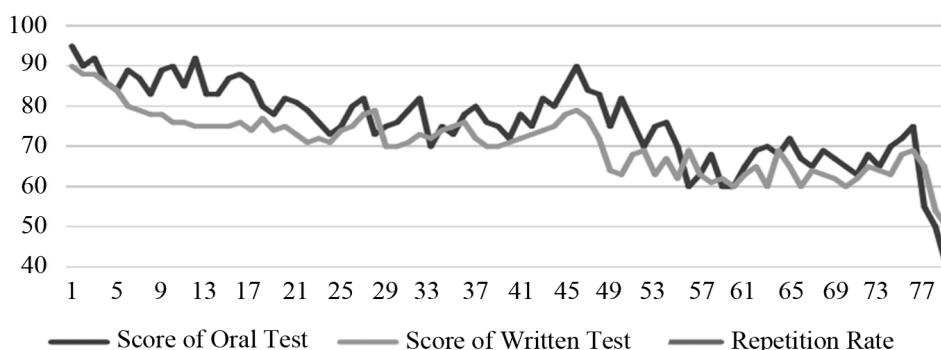
80 students taking this course are from different departments in Shandong Normal University, with different majors and at different grades. 79 students attended the final examination and completed the questionnaire at the same time. Recordings from oral test were converted into texts as a means of data analysis.

#### 3.2.1 Chinese Culture Test

Through comparing texts from tests and the corresponding texts from the textbook, we found that the parts of repetition dominantly include lexical phrases, fixed

expressions, sentence patterns, compound structures, or some formula language. They are what have been defined as lexical chunks. That is to say, there are a certain number of lexical chunks in students' written or oral expressions, which are learnt from textbook. Retrieve these repeated words or phrases, lexical repetitions were filtered and lexical repetition rate was established accordingly. It's helpful to analyze the relationship between lexical repetition rates and scores, which signals how much lexical chunks may influence Chinese culture expressions.

While answering the questions in written form, 57% students can give an explicit description by mainly employing lexical chunks learnt in class; 33% students can answer the questions briefly but not exactly based on what they have learnt in or out of class. 10% students can answer the questions in their own way by using the knowledge beyond what have been learnt. The relationship between their scores and lexical repetition rates can be presented in the following figure.



**Figure 1**  
**Relationship Between Repetition Rate and Score**

As can be seen from the figure above, lexical repetition rate is positively correlated with the score significantly, and the more lexical repetitions used, the higher score achieved. Therefore, it shows that lexical chunk input has a significant effect on Chinese culture

expression in English. This point can be confirmed more obviously in the following two tables, where scores over 80 and below 65 both in written and oral tests are selected and their lexical repetition rates are compared.

**Table 1**  
**Scores Over 80 Both in Written and Oral Tests and Their Repetition Rate**

■ Score of oral test	84	89	86	92	90	95
■ Score of written test	84	80	86	88	88	90
■ Repetition rate	47.30%	47.50%	48.60%	51.10%	51.30%	52.70%

**Table 2**  
**Scores Below 65 Both in Written and Oral Tests and Their Repetition Rate**

■ Score of oral test	40	50	63	60	60	63
■ Score of written test	50	54	62	60	62	63
■ Repetition rate	8.50%	14.70%	19.60%	20.70%	30.10%	30.10%

Students with high scores prefer to use more words or phrases learnt in textbook, which may definitely help their richness in content and accuracy in expression. On the contrary, students with low scores are not able to use enough words or phrases taken from textbook, which may have an adverse effect on the quality of their expressions, some failing to describe meanings exactly and fully. At the same time, in oral test, some of them are clearly eager to utter their own meanings but hesitate to speak, and finally give up. More surprisingly, two of them even partly use Chinese to complete their meanings in their answers. These reactions strongly prove that Chinese students do have native cultural schema in their mind, but it is the quantities of Chinese culture input and communicative ability that determine whether they can successfully express Chinese culture in English or not.

The poor performance of those students also proves the existence of the Gap Phenomenon. Chinese English learners have already formed certain cognitive schema to their native culture in their brains, which can be detected from answering questions partly in Chinese. That means,

as a prerequisite, Chinese English learners have some meanings to convey predominantly, which help them leap over the first G1 easily. However, if they want to cross the gaps between what they desire to express and what exactly should be expressed (g1 and g2), large amounts of Chinese cultural input, that is, lexical chunks, become necessary apparently.

From the above figures, we can also observe that, scores of oral test are generally higher than those of the written test, which may be possibly caused by various communicative skills used in oral expressions.

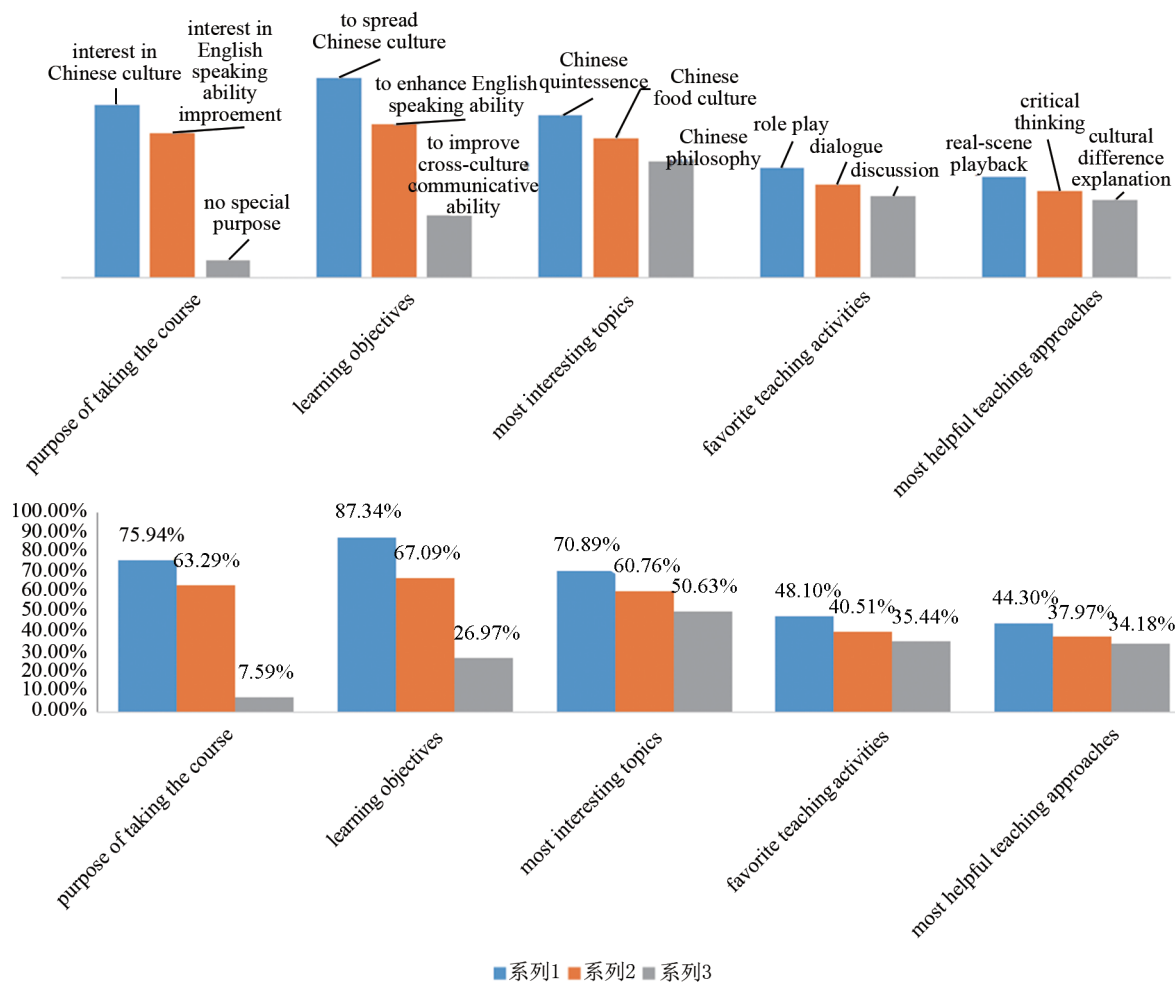
### 3.2.2 Questionnaire

This test is divided into two parts because Part I contains 5 questions followed by at least 3 options each, and students can choose one or two or three answers to each question only if those options are true for them. Part II contains 5 open questions to collect further data about students' satisfaction, attitude or detailed suggestions.

#### 3.2.2.1 Questionnaire Part I

Frequency of each selected option was recorded and options with high-frequency were screened and sorted out.

Top Three Options of Each Question in Questionnaire Part I



**Figure 2**  
First Three Options Chosen Most Frequently of Each Question in Part I

75.94% students hold that they take the course because they are interested in native culture, and 63.29% students are eager to improve their oral English, which apparently works as their motivations for learning. More specifically, majority of students prefer to spread Chinese culture and improve their own English speaking ability as well. But few of them have cross-culture awareness.

The course is composed of 12 chapters and 16 topics about Chinese traditional culture. Among the 16 options, covering all the contents taught in class, only Chinese quintessence, food culture and philosophy prevail over the rest. This is a cue focus that students love those with distinctive ethnic characteristics, unique and original art and long historical inheritance. As for the favorite teaching activities and approaches in Chinese culture teaching, no matter whether it's a role play, dialogue or real-scene playback, students prefer situational involvement to textbook learning. After all, culture is everywhere in their real life and the real scene activities may create immersive experience, contributing directly to cross-cultural communication. When it comes to other favorite activities like discussion, it indicates that college students are willing to make comments and exchange ideas with peers through cooperation to develop their own thinking ability. Lastly, students like cultural difference explanation as a form of knowledge input, where they can not only learn their native culture, but also get to know a different culture. By means of comparison and contrast, they may know the world culture better and love more Chinese culture.

### 3.2.2.2 Questionnaire Part II

From the answers to the 5 open questions in Questionnaire Part II, the main points can be summarized as follows:

After learning the course, most students held a strong belief in native culture and desired to study further. While some students mentioned that they knew Chinese culture a lot and it was not necessary to learn it in English; and few students showed no interest in Chinese culture because it had not been included in their English final examinations. It subtly implies utilitarianism in learning native culture and that not all students understand the importance of spreading Chinese culture and the meaning of cross-cultural communication.

Most of the students agreed that they harvested a lot in ideological and cultural contents. And some mentioned that they had learnt seas of English language knowledge, including vocabulary, phrases and useful expressions and fixed structures, which is a strong proof that lexical chunks are most impressive parts left in students' mind once they've finished learning. Some students claimed that they really made some progress in spoken English.

Some students were inspired to learn more traditional culture with Chinese characteristics. And some students exposed their expectation that Chinese culture could be subsumed into English evaluation system so that they might spend more time and energy on it. And there were

some enthusiastic students who wanted more interesting activities adopted by teachers in class and complained that their college English teachers failed to cultivate their English spoken ability.

## 4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

According to the data in the findings above, in order to integrate Chinese cultured into college English teaching effectively, teachers in practice should be aware of the following points: (a) to emphasize the significance and reasons of spreading Chinese culture; (b) to take chance to teach more with Chinese distinctive features or historical origin; (c) to adopt scene-style teaching method or situational teaching style; (d) to do more productive practice on the basis of enough lexical chunks input; (e) to develop students creative and critical thinking in teaching activities, especially through cultural comparison or contrast.

### 4.1 Ultimate Goal of Chinese Culture Expressed in English

Great interest in Chinese culture shows that students still have a strong sense of native cultural identity, which may drive some scholars' fears away, who are afraid of insufficiency of Chinese cultural identity among college students. Unfortunately, students know their passion for native culture but they fail to realize why they need to spread native culture: To make cross-cultural communication effective and successful, and to establish Chinese culture influence internationally. Maybe they are not long-sighted enough or have no international eyes. As a result, it is teachers who should take the responsibility to clarify the ultimate goal of spreading Chinese culture and should let students know why Chinese culture must be expressed in English.

### 4.2 Chinese Culture Input

Students love Chinese culture, especially those with distinctive ethnic characteristics, unique and original art and long historical inheritance, which may arouse their national pride and be conducive to national confidence establishment. Furthermore, as Chinese descendants, it's our responsibility to safeguard and carry forward traditional Chinese culture. Inadequacy of native culture in English textbooks as well as English classes leads to misunderstandings and confusion among college students, who may think that Chinese culture expressed in English is not necessary or there is no proper way to learn Chinese culture expressed in English. So it's strongly suggested that, apart from opening optional English courses related to Chinese culture, teachers are bound to include parts of Chinese culture students like in college English teaching to seize the opportunity to spread Chinese culture.

### 4.3 Lexical Chunks Input

Because lexical chunks are mostly generated according to certain grammatical rules, when used without conscious

grammatical structure, they are beneficial to greatly shorten the time spent from understanding to production, and eventually improve the accuracy and fluency of language output. Teachers in class should inform students of the importance and functions of lexical chunks, then teach them how to identify these language chunks and provide chances for them to practice. When students find out their benefits, they would certainly take the chance to produce more and their speaking ability will be enhanced finally.

#### 4.4 Situational Teaching Style

Students would like to learn Chinese culture in real-scene situations, where their interest could be stimulated to improve learning efficiency. Situational teaching allows students to explore the event and solve the problem in the context, through which they can comprehend automatically and construct meaning naturally. In the process of real-scene involvement, students' language skills can be cultivated and application ability can be improved; meanwhile, their language acquisition can be reinforced as the connection between the new input language and known information in mind is strengthened in situations. More importantly, in the interaction between students and real environment, development of emotion and cognition is also obtained.

#### 4.5 Productive Language Output Activities

Students like to produce language in the activities like dialogue, role play and discussion, which might be related to lexical chunks input as well as the existing schema of native culture in mind. Because of schema of native culture, students have something to express in meaning, which makes crossing G1 easy and reduces difficulty of language output to some extent. What is left in language production is how to express these meanings in English. At this moment, lexical chunks in English seem to be effective to improve language accuracy and immediacy, which may help cross g1 and g2 and make successful Chinese culture speakers. Since students prefer to verify what they have learnt in class through participating in various productive language output activities, it is right time for teachers to create more chances in class.

At the same time, productive language output activities like discussion or answering critical thinking questions can stimulate students' creativity by questioning, exploring, reasoning, analyzing, evaluating or judging etc. The cultivation and internalization of creative thinking is beneficial to all-round development of students. In this respect, it is advisable to implant productive practice into Chinese culture teaching.

## CONCLUSION

To learn and carry forward Chinese culture is an inevitable trend for Chinese college students to absorb nourishment from history and tradition, and promote

their native cultural identity; it also helps to establish Chinese international image and advance international communication. Chinese culture expressed in English can find its way in cross-cultural communication in view of English language international influence. As a result, to integrate Chinese culture into College English teaching is a practical strategy to create Chinese culture worldwide impact. The setting of Chinese culture as an English optional course in College English teaching is an attempt, designed to combine Chinese culture with college English teaching, providing a constructive paradigm for cultivating students' English expressions of Chinese culture, and exercising their ability of using English and avoiding Chinese culture aphasia in intercultural communication. This attempt is supposed to enhance students' enthusiasm in learning Chinese culture as well as English language, so as to develop them into a confident, influential and successful cross-cultural communicator.

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