

## A Series of Applied Research on *Understanding Contemporary China Teaching Materials* With the Aim of Cultivating High-Quality English Language Talents

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### Abstract

The globalization and intelligent era have brought more opportunities and challenges for China's social development, and put forward more requirements for Chinese college English education. In response to changes in domestic and international situations, the Ministry of Education of China has put forward the goal of the construction of new liberal arts, and proposed the requirement of training talents who can inherit and carry forward Chinese culture and spread Chinese voice in the new era. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press has published a series of teaching materials titled *Understanding Contemporary China* in July 2022. With the aim of cultivating high-quality English language talents, this paper analyzes how to better apply the series of textbooks *Understanding Contemporary China*, hoping to help improve the phenomenon of Chinese cultural aphasia in English teaching and reserve more high-quality English language talents for national development and national rejuvenation.

**Key words:** English language talents; *Understanding Contemporary China*; Applied research

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In the face of the current complex and volatile international environment, how to cope with numerous

destabilizing factors, enhance the comprehensive national strength in the rapidly changing global landscape, and achieve national rejuvenation is an important issue that we always pay attention to. In essence, the competition of comprehensive national strength can be regarded as the competition of talents. As a precious talent resource, college students' education and training are directly related to the future development of the country.

In different stages of social development, the relationship between China and the international community has undergone different changes. Therefore, the requirements for foreign language talents are also changing. With the gradual increase of international attention, the demand for China to explain its own propositions, concepts and policies is increasing, which puts more and higher requirements on English language talents. High-quality English language talents must have a comprehensive understanding of the world and China, and must be able to use language media to present the image of China and convey the voice of China. In this context, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press launched a series of teaching materials entitled *Understanding Contemporary China*.

### 1. SIGNIFICANCE AND VALUE OF TEACHING MATERIALS

Textbooks are the material carrier of the curriculum. They are compiled around the teaching syllabus or curriculum standards, reflecting the current social values and concepts, conveying authoritative knowledge content, and playing a dominant role in teaching activities and teaching content. English textbooks not only play a role in imparts language knowledge and skills, but also bear the important responsibility of cultural communication. In the face of the current drastic changes in the international situation and the strong demand for the dissemination

of Chinese civilization, the significance and value of the English series of *Understanding Contemporary China* are mainly reflected in the following aspects:

### 1.1 Cultural Presentation

Language has two characteristics: tool and culture. Among them, cultural attribute is the fundamental attribute of language, and language is the external embodiment and transmission medium of national culture. For a long time in the past, college English teaching in China has focused on language knowledge teaching, with the main goal of cultivating talents with foreign language skills. English teaching materials emphasize the instrumental attribute of language while ignoring the cultural attribute, and the teaching content has a distinct exam-oriented feature. From the perspective of higher education, the series of textbooks on *Understanding Contemporary China* pay more attention to students' cultural literacy and intercultural communication ability. While teaching English language knowledge, it highlights cultural content. At the same time, the presentation and compilation of cultural content follow the rules of students' cognitive development, and consolidate and expand cultural knowledge.

In the process of cultural presentation, the series of textbooks on *Understanding Contemporary China* has achieved an equal view of the target language culture and the mother tongue culture (Liu, 2023). No matter what kind of language and culture has irreplaceable unique values, the imbalanced transmission of a certain language and culture will lead to the imbalance of students' cultural values. Meanwhile, the series of textbooks simultaneously present the mother tongue culture, English culture and world culture, which helps students develop cultural sensitivity and understand cultural differences from the perspective of integrity and objectivity. On the basis of in-depth understanding of the mother tongue culture, I can digest and accept the target language culture more smoothly, and absorb the essence of different cultures with a more open and inclusive attitude and further improve my own cultural literacy.

At the same time, this series of teaching materials pay attention to representativeness in the process of selecting cultural content. In order to prevent the problem of over-generalization, the presentation of Western mainstream culture is highlighted, so as to avoid prejudice, misunderstanding or stereotype in the learning process of students. In addition, the content structure of the series of textbooks follows the law of students' cognitive development, and gradually develops in the order of simple to complex, shallow to deep, concrete to abstract, imperceptibly stimulating and cultivating students' interest and guiding students to gradually explore cultural content.

### 1.2 Cultural Openness

Language and culture education emphasizes inclusiveness. It is necessary for students to establish the concept of equality of language and culture, realize the rationality of different cultures in human society, and be able to discover the characteristics and advantages of different cultures, which requires the compilation of teaching materials to maintain an open and accommodating attitude. It shows the essence of different cultures and guides students to learn to maintain objective and rational cognition when facing different cultures (Yang,2023). With the help of English language teaching, the series of textbooks *Understanding Contemporary China* show the dynamic development of multi-culture in today's society. On the one hand, it emphasizes language knowledge and skills, on the other hand, it does not ignore the cultural connotation behind the language, so that students can contact and understand the world culture while learning English. At the same time, it can broaden their horizons and open their attitudes, and learn how to break the cultural restrictions of their mother tongue. It helps establish a diversified world consciousness, and be able to establish dialogue and exchange with other cultures with an equal mentality.

The inclusiveness emphasized in the compilation of teaching materials is not to be all-inclusive, but to establish a diversified order on the basis of eliminating the superfluous and extracting the essence. Compared with other textbooks, the series of *Understanding Contemporary China* shows more diversified language and culture. First, the textbooks cover 9 foreign languages including English and international Chinese, and select different kinds of excellent cultures not limited to Western countries such as Britain and the United States, which opens an international perspective and enables students to have access to more different kinds and characteristics of cultural content. Secondly, taking Chinese minority culture and North American Indian culture as examples, the textbooks reflect the cultures of different ethnic groups and different classes to some extent. Finally, taking the American Civil War as an example, the textbooks show the historical development of different national cultures to some extent. The rich and diverse teaching materials help students understand the rationality of different cultures and enhance the degree of openness and tolerance.

Constrained by cultural habits and thinking patterns, students are prone to stereotypical prejudice, inferiority or ethnocentrism in the process of cross-cultural communication, which is a major factor restricting the improvement of students' cross-cultural communication ability and comprehensive cultural literacy (Yang,2022). The *Understanding Contemporary China* series of textbooks maintains an open attitude towards mother tongue and different cultures, objectively and truly

reflects the characteristics of different cultures under different types, levels and historical development stages, so that students can learn to eliminate inherent ideas and preconceived positions, establish a pluralistic and open communication concept, and learn to observe and understand the world from different cultural perspectives. They can find a constant stream of new inspiration.

### 1.3 Cultural Reflection

Understanding the mother tongue culture is an important goal of cultural teaching. Emphasizing cultural reflection and strengthening the learning and understanding of Chinese culture are the contents that must be paid attention to in college English teaching. Therefore, English teaching materials must set up the awareness of students' understanding of English and Chinese culture in contrast, so that students can understand the significance of examining and reflecting on the mother tongue culture from the perspective of different cultures while learning English culture. In the follow-up process of learning English language and culture, we should not relax our further research and understanding of our national culture.

In the information age environment, the tendency of cultural hegemonism has emerged. In the field of higher education, there is a phenomenon of over-emphasizing the learning of Western culture while ignoring the inheritance and transmission of Chinese culture, which is undoubtedly not conducive to the cultivation of high-quality talents. When looking at Western culture rationally, it is not difficult to find that it also has problems such as economic crisis, the supremacy of capital, and the prominent contradiction between man and nature, which students need to face up to in the process of English language and culture learning, and which must also be presented in English textbooks. In the context of globalization, the problems faced by Western countries may also become the challenges that China needs to meet on the road of future development. As a national reserve of high-quality talents, college students must master the ability of cultural reflection in the process of English learning.

The series of textbooks on *Understanding Contemporary China* abandon the extreme attitude of total denial or blind worship, and contrast and explain the Eastern and Western cultures from the perspective of cultural reflection, so that students can get rid of the mechanized learning mode of rote learning, stimulate students' fun in the development and exploration of different cultures, absorb the essence of different cultures, and deepen their understanding of mother tongue culture. They develop the habit of reflection in comparative learning, and learn to view Eastern and Western societies, groups and individuals from multiple perspectives.

## 2. TEXTBOOK APPLICATION STRATEGY

Observing the current situation of college English teaching in China, it is not difficult to find that most front-line teachers still follow the past teaching methods in the process of textbook application, that is, vocabulary and grammar as the teaching center to teach language knowledge and skills. Most of the course content falls on language reading, writing, translation, grammar explanation and application, etc. Insufficient attention is paid to relevant cultural content in teaching materials (Liu, 2024). In order to cultivate high-quality English language talents, teachers should make appropriate changes, and pay attention to the following aspects when carrying out teaching activities with the series of textbooks of *Understanding Contemporary China*:

### 2.1 Content Application

Due to the limitations of objective conditions, teaching materials cannot introduce and explain foreign culture-related content in any detail. Therefore, teachers need to master the framework of teaching materials, start from the general direction, and carry out teaching in a gradual way. First, we should ensure that students have a general understanding of the cultural system, and then fill the details into the knowledge system to stimulate students' interest in learning and guide them to carry out independent exploration (Li, et al, 2024).

Topics in the series of *Understanding Contemporary China* are arranged from simple to difficult in a spiral way. In the course of textbook application, attention should be paid to the unity of teaching content structure and students' cognitive structure, the correlation between unit topics should be paid to build a clear and clear main line of cultural teaching, and at the same time ensure that cross-cultural knowledge content is repeated in the process of language teaching.

In the process of textbook application, teachers need to learn to change their perspective, understand and meet students' learning needs from the perspective of students. For example, freshmen who have just begun to receive college English teaching have a strong curiosity and exploration spirit, and at the same time, they will encounter confusion and problems in the new learning stage. Therefore, in the application process of textbooks, emphasis should be placed on displaying cultural contents that are close to students' life, inspiring and pioneering, and at the same time, parts of Chinese culture that are similar to different cultures should be selected for comparative teaching. We need to eliminate the unfamiliar psychology of students, so that students can gradually build a new cognitive system that integrates excellent foreign culture and mother tongue culture through learning materials.

## 2.2 Focusing on Innovation

Innovation is the key to social progress. English teaching materials not only play the role of teaching and disseminating multi-culture, but also serve as a hotbed for students to innovate and construct culture, as well as a driving force for students to generate new culture with characteristics of The Times. In the course of the application of the series of *Understanding Contemporary China* textbooks, it is necessary to design an open context for students to explore from the content of the textbooks, encouraging interaction, critical thinking and innovative construction. In addition, interactive cultural learning activities should be set up around the content of the textbook. For example, when telling the content of the American War of Independence, students can be divided into different groups and arranged to discuss their own viewpoints from different perspectives such as white Americans, African Americans and Europeans, so as to create multi-angle cultural vision and guide students to examine other cultures and look at our culture from the perspective of different cultures. While broadening the horizon and opening up the mind, it is natural to realize the innovative construction of culture in the understanding, learning and communication activities.

It is necessary to recognize that the language and cultural content in the series of *Understanding Contemporary China* textbooks is only part of the teaching. To maximize the role of the textbooks, we must make full use of the learning space created by the textbooks, fully respect the principal position of students, ensure that students can exert their subjective initiative and actively participate in the learning and exploration of the textbooks, and get rid of the shackles of the past indoctrination teaching. The cultural content of English course is endowed with the attributes of exploration and generation, so that students can explore the cultural content in the teaching material and experience the fun of innovative learning as the main body of teaching.

## 2.3 Equally Important Tools and Culture

The textbook is written according to the teaching content, and as the core material of the course development, it runs through the teaching activities and plays a basic supporting role. The relationship between language and culture develops dynamically. The former is the carrier and component of culture, and reflects and embodies culture to a certain extent. The level of language depends not only on the ability of language communication, but also on the understanding of cultural content. It can be seen that the use of textbooks to carry out English teaching activities should be both instrumental and cultural (Tian and Mo, 2024). College English teaching should teach students how to use English to express ideology and culture, have the language cognitive ability

of exploration, research, analysis and summary, make clear the cultural significance of English and English application, and help students establish a cultural concept of respect, understanding, identification and inclusiveness. The design and arrangement of the series of textbooks *Understanding Contemporary China* not only emphasizes language skills and abilities, but also pays great attention to the cultural content behind the language, and attaches great importance to the display of heterogeneous cultures and the improvement of students' cultural literacy. In order to give full play to the value of the series of textbooks, it is necessary to pay equal attention to tools and culture.

When developing the instrumental value of teaching materials, it is necessary to pay attention to the fact that language learning cannot repeat the past mechanized teaching methods and cannot turn English classes into indoctrination classes with no vitality. After primary and middle school education, college students have a certain English foundation and do not have to face the huge pressure of college entrance examination. A series of textbooks are compiled according to the needs and characteristics of college students, providing more possibilities for flexible use of teaching methods. Teachers can create a cultural atmosphere and implement immersive teaching by using scene construction from the teaching materials, so that students can complete language learning in the context. Teachers can flexibly use thematic discussion, group debate and other means to encourage students to actively participate in classroom communication and express their experience of cultural content with the language knowledge they have learned, and teachers can guide, solve doubts and summarize and supplement. By providing language output channels to help students strengthen their English language skills, and by creating an atmosphere to provide students with an environment for cultural communication, thinking and exploration, the two-pronged approach ensures that the value of the course is effectively brought into play, and students' language knowledge, skills and cultural literacy can be comprehensively cultivated and improved.

Conclusion: Since the 21st century, China's national strength has improved qualitatively, the degree of participation in international affairs has increased, and the importance of English as an international language has also increased. English teaching materials are the key to ensure the smooth implementation of college English teaching and the achievement of teaching goals. In order to cope with the current development situation at home and abroad and cultivate high-quality talents with foreign language skills and cross-cultural communication ability, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press has launched a series of teaching materials titled *Understanding Contemporary China*. This series of textbooks are of great value in the aspects of cultural content presentation, cultural reflection and

cultural opening, etc. Centering on the goal of training high-quality English language talents, this paper discusses how to better apply the textbooks from three perspectives: content application, emphasis on innovation, and equal emphasis on tools and culture. In order to maximize the effectiveness of the textbooks, It provides reference for the training of English language talents in colleges and universities.

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