

# A Research on “Chinese Culture Aphasia” in College English Teaching

**Xiaohui Bian**

Qilu Medical University, Zibo, 255300, China

---

**Abstract:** The present paper, based on daily teaching experience, aims to analyze the causes of Chinese culture aphasia in college English teaching and hopes to put forward some corresponding measures to address the problem of Chinese culture aphasia in college English teaching from the aspects like textbook compiling, respective measures targeted to both students and teachers and the strengthen of Chinese culture, and thereby to improve the ability of college students to express Chinese culture in English.

**Keywords:** College English teaching; Chinese culture aphasia; Causes; Corresponding measures

---

## 1. Research Background

With the rapid advancement of globalization, the international interactions have become increasingly frequent than before. Therefore, great importance has been attached to the global language-English. In Chinese colleges, teachers and students have paid unprecedented attention to English teaching and study.

As is pointed out by Byram(1989)<sup>[1]</sup>, culture is the “hidden curriculum” in foreign language teaching, and language teaching cannot exist independently from the teaching of culture content. In terms of English teaching in China, western culture has been one-sidedly understood as the “target” language culture, and the importance of native language culture has been to some extent ignored. Although many students have learned English for approximately more than ten years, they fail to communicate with foreigners on topics related to Chinese culture, and communication barriers may emerge. Since the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, this issue has gained a lot of attention among the English Education field. In 2000, the concept “Chinese Culture Aphasia” was first put forward by Professor Cong Cong of School of Foreign Languages, Nanjing University to name this phenomenon, and she also claims that the phenomenon may hold back the dissemination of Chinese culture around the whole world.<sup>[2]</sup> Therefore, it is urgent to strengthen the Chinese culture education in English teaching.

The present research aims to analyze the causes leading to Chinese cultural aphasia in college English teaching and propose some effective methods to cultivate students’ cross-cultural communication ability and improve their Chinese culture expressiveness in English.

## 2. Reasons for Chinese Culture Aphasia in College English Teaching

After reviewing the previous researches on this issue and with some questionnaires and interviews concerned, the reasons for “Chinese Culture Aphasia” in College English teaching can mainly be summarized as following:

### 2.1 The Powerful Position of the English Culture

During more than one century’s development of English education in Chinese Colleges and Universities, the strong indoctrination effect of English culture has formed its unshakable cultural dominance in Chinese English classes. Western culture, especially British and American culture, the so-called core of English Classes, has unconsciously influenced college students’ ideology during the process of English learning. Some students may blindly worship the western culture and even completely dismiss the Chinese culture, not to speak of their inability to talk about Chinese culture in English.

With the deepening of international communication and cooperation, the Chinese culture “going out” strategy has

been proposed by the Chinese authorities. College English teachers must put more emphasis on cultivating students' cultural awareness, enhancing their sensitivity and flexibility to cultural differences and improving their cross-culture communication ability.

## **2.2 Insufficient Chinese Culture Emphasis and Accumulation**

Although the College English Curriculum Requirements issued by the Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education urge teachers to improve college students' comprehensive cultural literacy, including the ability to translate introductory articles about China's national conditions and culture, the English textbooks used in Chinese colleges and universities are mainly based on western culture. As is pointed out by Zhang Weiming (2002), the lack of Chinese culture content in English teaching materials is one of the main reasons for Chinese culture aphasia<sup>[3]</sup> As one of the main means for college students to learn English, the present college English textbooks will inevitably lead to students' inability to accumulate knowledge of Chinese culture, which is not conducive to the cultivation of students' cultural awareness and cross-cultural ability.

In the meantime, English teachers have always centered around the introduction of western culture instead of teaching the corresponding English expressions of Chinese culture. As a result of the long-term exposure to western culture, some English learners' identification with western culture has been so strong that to some extent they even become the spokespersons of western culture.

Many English teachers in China have grown up in the exam-oriented education environment, and their inadequate understanding of Chinese culture makes it difficult for them to express Chinese culture accurately in English. To some extent, it is no exaggeration to say that Chinese English teachers take great responsibility for the lack of Chinese culture in college English teaching.

As for the present higher education in China, only a few universities and colleges offer courses on teaching Chinese culture in English. The Chinese culture courses are mostly presented in Chinese rather than in English. It is difficult for students to describe Chinese culture with correct corresponding English words. Therefore, when faced with cross-cultural situation, many students even become "speechless" when they are asked to introduce Chinese culture in English.

## **3. Suggested Solutions to Chinese Culture Aphasia in College English Teaching**

Based on above discussions and findings, the present paper attempts to put forward some methods to strengthen the penetration of Chinese culture in all aspects of college English teaching so as to improve students' cross-cultural literacy and help them possess good expressiveness of Chinese culture, which will in turn help spread Chinese culture all around the world and overcome Chinese cultural aphasia.

### **3.1 Establish Equal Cross-cultural Communication Awareness in College English Teaching**

During the college English teaching process, it is of great necessity for teachers to consciously guide students to establish an equal cultural outlook, supplement as many corresponding English expressions of Chinese culture as possible and conduct in-depth comparative analysis between Chinese and Western culture. It must be made clear to students that every culture has its own merits, and there is no distinction between good and bad culture. They should take a critical attitude toward the western culture, absorb the essence and discard the gross of the target language culture. They have the responsibility to promote the essence of Chinese culture around the whole world. With the improvement of the intercultural communication awareness, students can express Chinese culture in English more accurately, thus acquiring the ability to communicate across cultures. Only in this way can they become the ambassadors of cultural exchange and introduce China's glorious civilization to foreign friends.

### **3.2 Enhance the Chinese Cultural Literacy of English Teachers**

As the conductors of the teaching process, English teachers' cultural ideas and attitudes will profoundly affect the teaching effectiveness. Recent survey shows that many interviewed college English teachers have insufficient knowledge of ancient Chinese culture, literature and history, and sometimes they fail to express Chinese culture and classical works in English. Luckily, English teachers have realized the importance of expressing Chinese culture in English, and they have consciously endeavored to improve their own Chinese cultural literacy. Besides individual efforts, lectures and trainings should also be supplemented to help Chinese English teachers learn Chinese culture and corresponding standardized English expressions. Only when teachers themselves are familiar with the essence of Chinese culture can they teach Chinese cultural knowledge in English to students.

### **3.3 Integrate Chinese Culture into English Course book**

As for the teaching of Chinese culture in English, the compilation of textbooks is of great importance. Colleges and universities should refine the existing English teaching course books and add Chinese cultural elements in the teaching process of listening, speaking, reading and writing. For example, English textbooks can be composed of materials about western culture theme, cross-cultural communication theme and Chinese culture theme. Materials about Chinese culture can be selected from the English versions of representative books or the articles of famous scholars at home and abroad. The audio-visual subjects can be selected from China International Television. Adding Chinese culture in the content of the textbooks will not only help to enrich students' cultural knowledge but also stimulate their interest in learning English and improve their cross-cultural communication ability.

### **3.4 Strengthen the Importance of Chinese Culture in the Evaluation System**

As for many Chinese students, examinations give them great impetus to learn. Therefore, to some degree, it is no exaggeration to say that the examinations serve as a baton or booster for teaching and will greatly improve students' learning efficiency. The education authorities should include some examination questions related to Chinese culture in various English tests so as to effectively urge students to learn the mother tongue culture. For example, in recent CET-4 and CET-6, some Chinese culture content has been added to the translation part, which is far from enough and has little effect on improving students' ability to express Chinese cultural in English. Anyway, to fundamentally eliminate the Chinese cultural aphasia phenomenon, new testing methods must be explored and added to the present testing system so as to form a brand-new and valid evaluation system.

## **4. Conclusion**

The existence of Chinese culture aphasia in college English teaching has aroused lots of concerns among the Chinese education communities. It reflects not only students' lack of Chinese culture knowledge, but also their incapability to introduce Chinese culture in proper English to people around the world.

In view of "Chinese culture aphasia" and its causes, teachers should take various effective measures to integrate Chinese culture into English teaching activities, rather than just teaching British and American culture. Only in this way can Chinese civilization, especially the essence of traditional Chinese culture be inherited by the younger generation in China. Only in this way can they truly achieve equal cultural exchanges in the cross-cultural communication processes.

## **References:**

- [1] Byram M. Cultural studies in foreign language education[M]. England: Multilingual Matters LTD,1989.
- [2] Cong Cong. "Chinese Culture Aphasia": The Defects of English Education in China[N], Guangming Daily,2000.10.19.
- [3]Zhang Weimin, Zhu Hongmei. Chinese Culture in College English Teaching[J]. Education Research, Tsinghua University, 2002(S1) :34-40.