

On the Ideological and Political Construction of English Literature Curriculum

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Abstract: Foreign language involves a wide range of personnel, covers a wide range of fields, both instrumental and humanistic characteristics, and plays a pivotal role in shaping students' correct world outlook, values, outlook on life, and cultivation of international vision and feelings of home and country. As a compulsory course for English majors, English Literature is very important to help students understand the history of English literature and the classic works of English literature. With the expansion and deepening of ideological and political education in colleges and universities, English Literature should break out of the comfort zone and shoulder the glorious responsibility of helping students build up confidence in Chinese culture, enhance their recognition of hypocrisy and "double standard" in Western culture, seek and promote the common values of China and the West, so as to contribute to the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind.

Keywords: English literature; Curriculum ideological and political; Cultural confidence; Seek common ground while reserving

Fund Project:

This paper is the phased research result of the key project of Sichuan Provincial Social Science Planning "Construction and Development Project of Foreign Language and Literature Disciplines in Universities in Sichuan Province" "Ideological and Political Construction of English Literature and Culture Courses under the New Liberal Arts Background" (No. SC21WY003) and the first batch of new liberal arts construction projects in Sichuan Province "Research on Ideological and Political Construction of English Courses of Literature and Culture in Universities".

In May 2020, the Ministry of Education issued the Guidelines for Ideological and Political Construction in the Curriculum of Colleges and Universities, which pointed out that "The fundamental issue of education is who to train, how to train, and for whom to train people, and the effectiveness of cultivating virtues is the fundamental standard for testing all work of colleges and universities. To carry out the fundamental task of cultivating virtues and cultivating people, we must integrate value building, knowledge imparting and ability cultivation into one and not separate them."^[1]

Foreign language is often mistaken as a language "tool" by the outside world, and its humanistic characteristics are often ignored. In fact, foreign languages are an indispensable part of China's higher education. All college students need to learn foreign languages. Most universities in China have foreign language majors, so the subject of foreign languages involves a wide range of personnel and covers a wide range of fields, which can be said to be unique. Foreign language educators in colleges and universities should never forget the feature of both instrumental and humanistic nature of the subject. In addition to training students' basic skills in listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating, they should also stick to the original mission of educating students for the Party and the country, effectively promote ideological and political education in the curriculum, and cultivate students' international vision and feelings of home and country silently.

Due to the need of language learning, there are a lot of introductions of foreign culture, history, politics, economy and other knowledge in college foreign language textbooks, while there are few introductions of Chinese culture. Due to professional needs,

English majors must understand and be familiar with the history, geography, culture, politics and other common sense of western countries, especially English-speaking countries. The explicit existence of a large number of Western cultures inevitably has a profound impact on students whose world outlook, values and outlook on life have not been fully formed. Without in-depth understanding of the origin and current situation of Western culture, students are easy to be confused by the appearance of prosperity of Western culture, so they have blind worship psychology, while ignoring the extensive and profound Chinese culture with a long history. As a compulsory course for college English majors, English Literature plays an important role in helping students to understand the history of English literature and British classic literary works. Relevant teachers should take the initiative to explore the ideological and political elements of the curriculum. The History of English Literature and Selected Readings by FLTRP is a traditional textbook for English majors, which covers the history of British literature from Anglo-Saxon times to the 20th century, as well as important writers and works. The ideological and political elements in the textbook will help students to recognize the hypocrisy in Western culture and encourage them to seek for the convergence of Chinese and Western culture. We should strengthen our confidence in local culture and make our own contribution to the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

1. Strengthen confidence in local culture

English majors know Shakespeare, Dickens and other great British writers, but may not have heard of the Seven sons of Jian 'an and the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, may not be familiar with the history of Chinese literature.

It is well known that the history of English literature began in the middle of the 5th century, while China had developed into the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420-589) at the same time. Before that, Chinese literature had already experienced the literature of pre-Qin Dynasty, Han Fu, prose and poetry of Han Dynasty, and Wei and Jin literature. There had long been left the Analects of Confucius, Zhuangzi, Mencius, Tao Te Ching, Sun Zi's Art of War and so on. Inheriting the precious literary heritage of the ancestors, the literature of the Southern and Northern Dynasties has become a great view, poetry, novels, literary criticism flourished. One of the most prominent examples is the Edict Song, a poem of the Yuefu in the Northern Dynasty that touches on the bleakness. The language of the poem is as plain as words and plain and unadorned. However, the scenery of the vast grassland is described magnificently, and the heroic and simple folk customs of the northern nomads also appear on the paper. After landscape poetry and palace style poetry, the standard of metrical rhyme of Chinese poetry was formed in the Southern Dynasty. At the same time, classical Chinese novels appeared in China, recording all kinds of strange stories and anecdotes about people or their snippets of words circulating in society. In the narrative of the plot, the description of characters and other aspects have begun to take shape.

In contrast to the early English literature, it is necessary to have a brief understanding of English history. It was not until the beginning of the 5th century AD that the Roman Empire, due to its own decline, all its garrisons left Britain and Roman rule over Britain ended. After the departure of the Romans, the Anglo-Saxons, the Jutes and other Germanic tribes invaded Britain from the mid-5th century onwards, which really started the history of Britain. There was no written language in English literature at that time, let alone important literary genres such as prose and fiction. Literature is nothing but the oral transmission of pagan and Christian poetry. The long Old English narrative poem Beowulf, regarded as the origin of English literature, was not recorded until the early 10th century AD ^[2]. In the fifth century, when Chinese literature was already abundant, what was called oral literature in Britain was just beginning.

The first recorded English poet with a surname is often attributed to Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400), by which time China was well into the Ming Dynasty and the vernacular short story was maturing, while Tang, Song and Yuan poems had already flourished, There have already emerged a large number of literary masters such as Li Bai, Du Fu, Liu Yong, Su Shi, Guan Hanqing, who have created immortal literary masterpieces and won acclaim. From the historical dimension, we can see that no matter the origin of literature or the quality and quantity of literary works, the achievements of Chinese literature before the 19th century were far from that of Britain. These historical facts will undoubtedly greatly enhance students' confidence in the excellent traditional Chinese literature and culture, and encourage more students to understand and compare the history of Chinese and English literature. Of course, with the rise of British literature and the decline of old China after the Opium War, as well as the establishment of various evaluation standards and

systems led by Western hegemony in modern and contemporary times, the evaluation of Chinese literature is a different matter, but it can also inspire students to work hard and brave responsibility for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

2. Identify Western hypocrisy and double label

Western media and politicians have always fooled the world with their so-called freedom, democracy and human rights, flaunting their culture and so-called “universal values”, but they do not know that their double standards and hypocrisy can be fully glimpsed through their classic literature.

Daniel Defoe, (1660-1731), *The Life and Strange and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* is based on the adventures of the Crusoe hero, Robinson Crusoe, who was born in a middle-class family and aims to travel all over the world. Robinson is fond of adventure. He often travels to the sea, and then sells black slaves. After a shipwreck, he falls into a desert island and expands territory on the desert island to survive tenaciously. By letting the Aborigines “Friday” to learn English, educate its faith in Christ and thoroughly “domesticate” the so-called savage, Robinson himself also became a desert island owner. Robinson has always been regarded by critics as a pioneering and enterprising bourgeois hero, which perfectly fits the spirit of *The Times* in 18th century Britain. However, from another perspective, the image of Robinson is the prototype of western colonizers and empire builders. He plundered, occupied the “isolated island” and enslaved the indigenous people, using the resources on the island to establish his own colonial rule, and reproduced the process of early British colonialism and imperialism expanding overseas, carrying out colonial development and building a colonial empire. With a strong sense of empire and colonial consciousness, it satisfies the Westerners’ desire to conquer and beautify the western narrative of colonialism. In the study of this novel, students can be encouraged to consult historical materials to cultivate their innovative and critical thinking ability, so that they can understand that capitalists often expedition the so-called wild lands in the guise of adventurers, slave trade is the evil means of primitive accumulation of capital, and the desert island in the eyes of colonists is actually the object of their colonization. Obscuring the indigenous peoples’ language and beliefs and making them worship the colonist’s culture was a common tactic used by the colonizers to subdue the colonists.

“*The Merchant of Venice*,” the masterpiece of William Shakespeare’s (1564-1616) satirical comedy, typifies Shylock as a mercenary, ruthless loan shark, It also portrays Portia, a new woman of wit and beauty, and the theme of the play is generally considered to be a celebration of charity, friendship, and love^[3]. In addition to introducing the traditional interpretation of the famous play by critics, students can also be encouraged to think positively and understand the work and characters from different perspectives. The hero Shylock’s greed for excessive profits is abhorrent, but in the court trial, he was angry against Christians for their sanctimony, plunder, public exploitation and oppression of slaves is an indisputable fact. When the Christians led by Antonio and Portia were in a disadvantageous position, they would exhort the Jewish Shylock to be compassionate with Christian teachings and morals. Once Shylock was defeated, they would show no mercy to him and would like to put him to death. The “double standard” and hypocrisy of Christians are vividly shown in their attitude towards Shylock, Jessica and other Jews. Heroine Portia dressed as a man, with its wisdom and wisdom not only successfully saved Antonio’s life and also with the maid Nilisa clever use of rings to tease their husband, for the future marriage life neutral in an equal place to lay a good foundation. Portia had courage, sense and respect for justice. He could not only safeguard the dignity of the law and enforce the law, but also lure the enemy into depth with ease and finally won a complete victory. Portia is undoubtedly the female figure of the new age and the perfect humanist that the author praises. However, from another perspective, it can be seen that Portia disguised herself as a man and “tied” her husband with a ring had something to do with the lowly status of women at that time, and her dedicated protection of her husband’s friends further proved that the patriarchal society and the Christian world had successfully brainwashed her. When she was domesticated and objectified, she also unconsciously did the evil for the people. During the study of this play, students can explore the deep-rooted racial discrimination, sexism and religious hypocrisy in Western culture.

There is no doubt that classical Western literature has a certain educational significance and zeitgeist, but they represent traditional Western values and often have a distinct class and racial stance. To read the Western literary classics, we should learn to adopt a critical attitude, objectively, rationally and dialectically view the so-called “universal values” and the value and significance of the works that are touted and deified by the West.

3. Seek common values

There are many different civilizations in the world and each has its own characteristics. However, human civilizations can still follow the basic values of humanity, justice, civilization, wisdom and trust. These common values provide the basic premise for human civilizations to carry out dialogue among civilizations and foster a higher level of global civilization.^[4] John Donne (1572-1631), a 16th-century English metaphysical poet, is famous for his love poems, religious poems, sermons and elegies full of whimsical metaphors. His poem “No Man Is an Island” is a stunning reminder that the world is connected, that no one can be an island in the ocean, that no one can stand alone and ignore the existence of others. This idea is similar to the “Great harmony with the world” in ancient Chinese Confucianism and Taoism.

When learning the famous poem London by William Blake (1757-1827), it can be pointed out that London symbolizes the preliminary industrialization of Britain through the analysis of the images of Thames, chimneys, churches and babies, chimney sweepers, soldiers and prostitutes. It is also a microcosm of the whole capitalist world. In order to pursue the greatest interests, capitalists seize resources, expand the market, squeeze laborers, and turn the beautiful world into a terrible hell. Capitalist industrialization is built on the basis of the exploitation of the proletariat and the ruthless destruction of nature. On the contrary, China’s development philosophy emphasizes the scientific outlook on development and insists on people-oriented, comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable development. Putting people first means taking the people’s interests as the starting point and goal of all our work. Sustainable development means that we need to balance the harmonious development between man and nature, strike a balance between economic construction, population growth, resource utilization, and ecological and environmental protection, and put the whole society on a path of civilized development featuring increased production, a prosperous life and a sound ecological environment. In the poem “London”, the poet, in the first person, is frozen by the horror before him. He hears the anguished cries of adults and children, the sighs of wounded soldiers and the curses of young prostitutes, sees the river and the street, the hungry crowd, the blood flowing from the blackened church and palace walls. The horrors of the Industrial revolution brought to London made poets shudder: the bourgeoisie was hogging all resources, the proletariat was struggling to death. Therefore, students can be guided to think and point out that industrialization is the inevitable outcome of the development of productive forces to a certain stage, and socialist countries also need industrialization. Socialist industrialization is aimed at improving the overall level of national productive forces and people’s living standards, while capitalism is based on individual interests and the accumulation of private wealth. Socialist industrialization pays attention to the harmonious development of economic construction and ecological environment and advocates the development road of ecological civilization. The poet’s description of the tragic scene of London in the early stage of industrialization reminds developing countries to emphasize that protecting the ecological environment means protecting productive forces and improving the ecological environment means developing productive forces. In encouraging students to reflect on London, students should be guided to cross the differences between China and the West, find common values, and come to the conclusion that, guided by the idea of “a community with a shared future for mankind”, they should adhere to the scientific outlook on development and promote the coordinated and sustainable development of economic construction and environmental protection.

4. Conclusion

In English Literature, there are as many ideological and political elements as a cow’s hair. From the prose “A Gentle Suggestion”, we can see the persecution of the Irish poor in religion, class and nationality by the British Empire in the 18th century. From the poem Ode to the West Wind, we can see the poet’s aversion to the reactionary and decadent forces and his ardent hope for the eventual victory of the revolution and the inevitable dawn. Starting from the novel Great Expectations, the author criticizes the “gentleman culture” of Britain and the wrong orientation of linking success with money and status, and guides students to combine their personal development with national interests and jointly realize the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. From the drama Pygmalion, students are guided to have in-depth discussion on the importance of language, and come to the conclusion that language learning can change fate and better understand other cultures and spread one’s own culture. In conclusion,

in the teaching process of English Literature, teachers should guide contemporary college students who are in a critical period of their life development to distinguish right from wrong, identify the hypocrisy of the West, firmly establish cultural confidence, seek common ground while putting aside differences, and contribute their unique strength to the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind.

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