

# A Study on Integrating Chinese Culture into ELT Classroom - Based on the Latest English Syllabuses in China

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**Abstract:** Chinese Culture Aphasia becomes a common problem in ELT Classroom in China. There are many reasons for this problem, but the core reason is that English teachers' teaching mainly focuses on the one-way input of the target language culture. Therefore, the content of Chinese culture in English tests and English teaching are insufficient, which makes college teachers mindless in language teaching. Furthermore, colleges or universities do not have official syllabuses for integrating Chinese Culture into ELT Classroom, while compulsory education and high schools in China have latest English syllabuses which give some detailed requirements for instructing teachers how to integrate Chinese culture into ELT Classroom. This study selects the objectives about Chinese culture for students in the latest syllabuses to analyze, and find out that: 1) the latest syllabuses give specific requirements for students in different levels; 2) these latest syllabuses detail what Chinese culture students should master in different phases. After studying on the latest English syllabuses for compulsory education and high school education in China, the author propose some suggestions about integrating Chinese culture into ELT Classroom for English teachers who teach students majoring in English. Firstly, policy makers in colleges or universities should revise the old syllabus, detailing specific requirements for English teaching. Secondly, Chinese culture can be divided into three levels for English major students: preliminary level, vantage level and higher level, and students can learn Chinese culture from the easy to the difficult. Thirdly, English teachers can utilize the local traditional Chinese culture to arouse students' interest in learning and promoting Chinese traditional culture. Fourthly, teachers should apply proper teaching methods to assist English language teaching effectively.

**Keywords:** The Latest English Syllabuses, Chinese Culture, ELT Classroom, English Major Students

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## 1. Introduction

English has become the interlanguage all over the world. With the development of China's economy, international communication is increasingly important in China. For Chinese people, the better understanding for Chinese culture and western culture, the better communication with foreign people. In promoting Chinese culture worldwide, the discipline of foreign languages and literature could play an important role. [12]. Most of Chinese students majoring in English are good at speaking English, however, they don't have too much knowledge about their native culture while they master western culture better, especially American and English. Chinese students majoring English should be required to have a good command of foreign languages and wide knowledge of humanities, be able to tell Chinese stories in foreign languages, thus it enable Chinese culture to go

global more effectively. [12]. Realizing the lack of Chinese culture, the Ministry of Education in China issued *the Guiding Outline of Ideological and Political Construction of Higher Education Curriculum (2020)*, which proposed that strengthen education in Chinese excellent traditional culture. [13]. It is a good chance for English teachers to discuss how to integrated Chinese culture into ELT Classroom.

## 2. Present Study of Chinese Culture Aphasia in Colleges

Increasing numbers of scholars realize the importance of culture in language teaching. Wilkins introduced culture to language teaching. [1]. Hymes considered communicative competence should be based on full understanding of social culture. [2]. Cortazzi & Jin (1999) proposed a category for

culture, that is source cultures, target culture, and international culture. [3]. Source cultures is learners' native culture, target culture refers to the culture in which the target language is used as a first language, and international target cultures is various cultures in English, or non-English-speaking countries which use English as an international language. [3]

In China, some scholars find out the significance of learners' native culture in learning English. Cong Cong is the first scholar who cited, *Aphasia of Chinese culture*, this term in teaching field. *Aphasia*, a word used in medical science means the loss or impairment of the power to use or comprehend words usually resulting from brain damage (as from a stroke, head injury, or infection). Cong Cong mentioned that some Chinese students are competent in speaking English while they cannot communicate Chinese culture in English with foreigners. [4]. Peng hongli did a test and the figures show that university students or college students lack of Chinese culture and the English skills needed to express Chinese culture. [8]. There are many reasons for this situation, but the core reason is English teachers' misunderstanding for language teaching - the current foreign language teaching focuses on the one-way input of the target language culture and ignores the two-way interaction between the systematic teaching of Chinese traditional culture and Foreign culture. [9]. The campaign for filtering Chinese culture into ELT is not successful. The most important two factors that affect Chinese culture infiltration intensity are: the content of Chinese culture in English tests and the content of Chinese culture in English teaching. [15].

Pei Xishan pointed out that the discussion about integrating Chinese culture into foreign language teaching have different key words in different stages. [10]. He divided it into three stages: 1) Strengthening intercultural teaching research stage (2004-2013); In this stage, the importance of cultivating intercultural communicative competence has been widely concerned and recognized. 2) Research stage of Enhancing Chinese Cultural Identity (2012-2016); researchers have recognized the important influence of

cultural identity on foreign language teaching. 3) Firming cultural Confidence (2017-2020); researchers realize cultural confidence is fundamental to the development of a country. After 2017, Chinese researchers pay more attention to study how to attract students' attention and build up confidence for their native culture.

These studies show that researchers are eager to cure Chinese students' *Aphasia of Chinese culture*. The discussion about this issue is over 20 years, now Chinese researchers study more on practical problems. For example, how to achieve a reasonable proportion of content among Chinese culture, target language culture and multi-culture in college English textbooks? Which way of presenting Chinese culture in college English textbooks (explicit or implicit) is more helpful to cultivate students' cross-cultural ability? [11].

### 3. Comparison on the Latest English Syllabuses in China

In China, the compulsory education (primary school and middle school) has official English syllabuses to guide teachers to teach English. Recently, the English syllabuses for compulsory education and high schools are revised In China. Here we collect the information from three syllabuses: *Full-time Compulsory Education and Senior High Schools English Curriculum Standard (experimental)(2001)*, *Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standard (2011)*, *General Senior High Schools English Curriculum Standard (2020)*. [5-7]. These syllabuses are written in Chinese, which are translated into English. In China, English syllabus include 9 levels - level 2 is graduation requirement for primary students; level 5 is graduation requirement for middle school students; level 8 is graduation requirement for primary students. There are a lot of new requirements in the revised versions, however, we focus on the revised part related to culture and Chinese culture. In the syllabuses, we focus on comparing the differences on item *General objective description* and *culture awareness*. See the tables as followed:

Table 1. General objective description.

Level	Version		Graduation requirement (2011-year-version)
	2001-year-version	2011-year-version	
Level 1	Be interested in foreign cultures and customs during English learning.	The same with 2011-year-version (use / in the following item)	Graduation requirement for primary students
Level 2	Be happy to know foreign cultures and customs		
Level 3	Students can realize the culture differences in communication.		
Level 4	Students can notice the culture differences between China and foreign countries.	/	Graduation requirement for middle school students
Level 5	To further enhance students' understanding & awareness of culture differences.		
Level 6	To experience language's culture background and culture connotation in communication.		
Level 7	To understand the cultural differences in communication; To form the consciousness of intercultural communication.	/	Graduation requirement for high school students
Level 8	To understand the background and connotation of culture, and have respective and tolerant attitude towards foreign culture.		
Level 9	To have stronger sense of the world.		
		Students can pay attention to latest news and have a strong sense of the world.	

According to table 1, we can see that the new version (2011-year-version) on general objective description only has revised level 9. The new general objective requires students to be concerned news in China and aboard.

Table 2. Culture Awareness.

Level	Version		Graduation requirement (2011-year-version)
	2001-year-version	2011-year-version	
Level 2	None	Students can initially notice the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures in study and daily communication.	Graduation requirement for primary students
Level 5	Deepen students' understanding of Chinese culture	Focus on the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures, and deepen students' understanding of Chinese culture; Students can preliminarily introduce the major Chinese festivals and typical cultural customs in English.	Graduation requirement for middle school students
Level 8	Deepen students' understanding of Chinese culture by comparing Chinese culture with foreign culture.	None	Graduation requirement for high school students

Table 3. Culture Awareness.

2020-year-revised version		
Level	Module	Content of Culture Knowledge
Level 6-8	Compulsory	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To know major traditional festivals in English-speaking countries (especially UK and USA), and their history, meaning in reality; To compare the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign traditional festivals, and discuss the value and significance of Chinese and foreign traditional festivals to cultural identity and cultural inheritance;</li> <li>2. To know the main customs in English-speaking countries (especially UK and USA); To compare them with the ones in China, be respective and inclusive to culture diversity;</li> <li>3. To know main sports activities in English-speaking countries (especially UK and USA), inspired by the common pursuit of sports spirit at home and abroad;</li> <li>4. To understand the cultural connotation of commonly-used English idioms and sayings; To compare their expression with Chinese, and feel the close relation between language and culture;</li> <li>5. To know the similarities and differences of behaviors and reception between Chinese and people in English-speaking countries (especially UK and USA), deal with the differences properly, confidently, communicate effectively;</li> <li>6. To learn and preliminarily introduce the Chinese traditional festivals and Chinese excellent traditional culture (such as Beijing Opera, literature, painting, garden, martial arts, food culture and so on), students have a sense of spreading Chinese excellent traditional culture.</li> </ol>
	Selectively compulsory	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To have basic knowledge of politics and economics in English-speaking countries (especially UK and USA); To compare the similarities and differences between China and foreign countries, accept the concept that mankind develop together;</li> <li>2. To understand commonly-used allusions and legends; compare them with the similar ones in China, analyze the similarities and differences, and understand the cultural connotations represented by different expressions;</li> <li>3. To know cultural background of commonly-used English expressions; To compare them with the similar one in China, enrich knowledge of history and culture, realize the deep meaning of words from cross-cultural perspective;</li> <li>4. To know the differences and integration between Chinese and foreign cultures, and preliminarily reflect the appropriateness and effectiveness of communication in cross-cultural communication;</li> <li>5. To use English to briefly introduce basic knowledge of Chinese culture, including traditional Chinese festivals, forms of expression of excellent traditional Chinese culture (such as Beijing Opera, literature, painting, garden, martial arts, food culture, etc.) and their connotation, and actively spread and promote excellent traditional Chinese culture.</li> </ol>
Level 9	Selective (advanced)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To know diplomatic relations of English-speaking countries (especially UK and USA), especially the history and current situation between them and China; To deepen love for the motherland, and defend national dignity and interests;</li> <li>2. To apply Chinese and foreign allusions and representative cultural features to express meaning and attitude, so that to have an effective cross-communication;</li> <li>3. To know China's positive impact on foreign countries' economics, politics, culture, feel the importance of Chinese civilization in world history, establish a sense of Chinese culture, strengthen cultural confidence.</li> </ol>

Table 2 shows that the new revised syllabus pays more attention on Chinese culture, detailing what Chinese culture students should master and can express in English. At level 2, the 2001-year-version syllabus does not give any requirements, while the latest syllabus has detailing requirements. *Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standard (2011)*, the latest syllabus shows that primary school students can initially notice the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures in study and daily communication when they graduate. Compared with the old one, the new syllabus is more specific to describe requirements for middle school students (at level 5). Middle school students not only pay attention to the the similarities

and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures, but also are able to introduce Chinese festivals and typical cultural customs in English.

At level 8, the graduation requirement for high school students, the syllabus does not point out any requirements, because there is another particular syllabus - *General Senior High Schools English Curriculum Standard (2020)* for high school English teaching.

*General Senior High Schools English Curriculum Standard (2020)*, the 2020-year-revised syllabus, it particularly mentions goal of culture awareness, that is, to gain culture knowledge, understand culture connotation, compare the differences and similarities of culture, absorb cultural

excellence, form correct values, firm cultural confidence, form self-esteem, self-confidence and self-improvement of good character, have abilities of certain cross-cultural communication and dissemination of Chinese culture. The content can be seen as followed:

As we can see from table 3, the syllabus proposes higher demands for higher school students' graduation. We summarize that the 2020-year-revised syllabus requires students who are able to talk about Chinese traditional festivals, customs, commonly-used idioms and sayings, behaviors and reception, Chinese excellent traditional culture, such as Beijing Opera, literature, painting, garden, martial arts, food culture and so on. Furthermore, students should have basic knowledge of politics and economics, know diplomatic relations between English-speaking countries and China, and apply Chinese allusions and representative cultural features to communicate effectively. The syllabus emphasizes that students should be strengthened cultural confidence for their native culture, and communicate with foreigners effectively.

## 4. Discussion

Based on the Latest English Syllabuses in China, we find that the Ministry of Education in China only issued a guideline for higher education, however, colleges or universities have their own right to write a syllabus based on their situation. Studying on the English syllabus for primary schools, middle schools, and high schools, some hints are learned from them for ELT Classroom in colleges or universities.

Firstly, policy makers in colleges or universities should revise the old syllabus, detailing specific requirements for English teaching. The 2020-year-revised syllabus gives a good demo to illustrate what Chinese culture English teachers should integrate into English teaching. Secondly, Chinese culture can be divided into three levels for English major students: preliminary level, vantage level and higher level. Chinese culture is extensive and profound, English major students can learn Chinese culture in English step by step. At preliminary level, students majoring in English should have capacity for introducing excellent traditional Chinese culture (such as Beijing Opera, literature, painting, garden, martial arts, food culture, etc.); At vantage level, the students should have knowledge of Chinese history, economics, politics and so on. At higher level, the students are able to think critically about the differences between Chinese culture and foreign culture. Thirdly, for English teachers, they can utilize the local traditional Chinese culture to arouse students' interest in learning and promoting Chinese traditional culture. China has a vast territory, and different places have different characteristics. Local students are more familiar with and fond of their hometown culture, which is an important part of Chinese traditional culture. Fourthly, teachers should critically apply teaching methods to ELT Classroom. Content-Based Instruction (CBI) (Zhao Yingji, 2019) or Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Wu Lan, 2020) are highly recommended by researchers. [15-16]. Proper teaching methods assist teachers in integrating

Chinese culture into ELT Classroom.

## 5. Conclusion

The latest English Syllabuses for primary schools, middle schools, and high schools in China, can give some hints for college teachers who are teaching students majoring in English. However, further research is needed to explore, such as teaching methods, activities and strategies to cultivate learners' ability to present Chinese culture in English. To solve these problems, more efforts and attempts is essential to do further research, and this topic has become one of the worthy research possibilities in the future.

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