

Pathways of Integrating Regional Culture into Foreign Languages Courses in Local Chinese Universities

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Abstract: In the delivery of foreign languages courses of local Chinese universities, regional culture is largely ignored. This paper stresses the importance of addition of regional culture, analyzes the underlying reasons why regional culture is overlooked from four perspectives: course settings, textbooks, teaching methodology and evaluation methods. Then the author comes up with corresponding strategies and concrete measures to include regional culture in foreign languages courses.

Keywords: Regional Culture; Foreign Languages Courses; Local Chinese Universities

1. Introduction

For a long time, China's global image is largely shaped by other countries rather than built by itself. There appears an apparent gap between information that comes in and goes out. In the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, manufactured-in-China goods have exerted a huge impact on the globe but China's global soft power is far from sufficient. As a matter of course, it is imperative that we build a discourse and narrative system that matches the country's hard power and international status.

China's 20th CPC National Congress stresses the desperate need to improve its international communication capabilities. In a national conference on publicity, President Xi Jinping puts forward seven perspectives, the last of which is to focus on promoting exchange and mutual learning among civilizations.

As the *2020 Edition of the Guide for College English* clearly points out, college English courses are meant to develop students' skills to understand and interpret Chinese culture, and serve the dissemination of Chinese culture to the rest of the world. This has been an ongoing effort to help students enhance their sense of

family and country and improve cross-cultural communication skills. the *Syllabus for English Majors in Colleges and Universities* also requires that English majors should have the skillset to promote fine traditional Chinese culture. Li Fawu (2014) maintains that the task of local higher education institutions is to serve regional economic and social development. So, local Chinese universities are closely related to the inheritance of unique regional culture. There is no denying the fact that China has a profound, diverse and unique culture. China is home to as many as 56 ethnic groups and it is a rich and colorful regional characteristic culture. the dissemination of Chinese culture in country-to-country communication cannot go without the exchange of Chinese regional culture. Therefore, it is essential to appropriately integrate characteristic regional culture when delivering foreign languages courses.

2. Analysis of Regional Culture Integration into Foreign Languages Courses Teaching in Local Chinese Universities

Foreign languages instructors should do all they can to nurture students' global vision and develop their cross-cultural communication skills. As a natural result, they will be able to leverage on foreign languages to engage in communication, disseminate Chinese culture and spread Chinese voices across the world.

For China to build an international discourse system and narrative system, enhance the national soft power, and tell Chinese stories well, Chinese universities are supposed to integrate Chinese cultural elements into foreign languages courses. As an important carrier of cultural inheritance, local universities take on due responsibilities of integrating local culture, and it is incumbent on them to promote regional culture. But there is still lots of room for improvement when it comes to the integration between foreign

language courses and regional culture.

2.1 Insufficient Courses of Regional Culture

Due to various factors such as school positioning, training direction, origins of students, and credit hours, there are few Chinese culture courses in the foreign languages curricular system of local universities, let alone regional culture. After searching CNKI with *foreign languages courses* and *regional culture* as the theme, the author finds out that only 4 relevant articles pertain to the integration of regional culture into foreign languages courses. This reveals the fact that the scope and number of such courses in Chinese universities are very limited. Ma Chunhua (2022) holds the view that the lack of foreign languages courses connected to regional culture is not conducive to the external dissemination of characteristic regional culture, and it is also not instrumental to instill students' skills to tell Chinese stories well in foreign languages.

2.2 Limited Coverage of Chinese Culture in Foreign Languages Textbooks

In 2020, the Ministry of Education issues the *Measures for the Management of Textbooks for Colleges and Universities*. It requires that textbook compilers should incorporate Chinese culture into textbooks, and stand firmly on China's global stand. It is strongly recommended that provincial education departments organize the formulation of textbook plans that reflect the advantages and characteristics of regional disciplines according to local conditions. Zhang Hong and Yu Rui (2020) believe that the current university foreign languages textbooks have not been able to reflect Chinese cultural features, and it is obvious that they pertain largely to British and American cultures. He Lianzhen (2022) is fully convinced that textbooks are an important tool for students' language acquisition and they are also the major means for teachers to impart skills.

In the foreign languages curriculum of local Chinese universities, most of the teaching materials are selected from original western literature. Contents are mostly related to the culture of British and American countries, and some textbooks even share the same issue of Chinese cultural vacuum. Li Jie (2016) finds that according to the questionnaire surveys,

students majoring in foreign languages in local universities have not yet had a good command of regional culture, and the corresponding English communication skills need to be improved urgently. These textbooks do not cover much regional culture and they lack in bilingual regional cultural resources. In this context, the influence of western culture is much more predominant than that of local Chinese elements. the collision of Chinese and foreign cultures is fierce, and students are more inclined to get disoriented. In this sense, the compilers of foreign language courses textbooks shoulder an arduous historical mission and responsibility.

2.3 Outdated Teaching Modes and Students' Lack of Interest in Learning

In a traditional foreign languages classroom, teacher is always the center of focus. Instructors deliver lectures to their students while ignoring the roles of students in learning. There is little interaction between teachers and students, which simply means that this is passive learning for learners. In this case, students do not get a chance to practice their learning autonomy. In the meantime, they are not intrinsically motivated, and the intended learning outcomes may not be achieved accordingly.

In addition, most of the traditional foreign language's classes are confined to the bricks-and-mortar classrooms. Therefore, the interactive activities turn out to be rather limited in number, and students may not get sufficient opportunities to practice their language skills. This is not conducive to the integration of regional culture into the foreign language's curriculum.

2.4 Undiversified Evaluation Methods

At present, the foreign languages courses of local Chinese universities are still mainly reliant on summative assessment, partially supplemented by formative assessment. In terms of score setting, final exam still accounts for the majority. In the author's university, for example, 60% of the final grades of college English courses are from final exams, while only 30% comes from students' in-class performances. 10% is related to students' practical language communication skills. the evaluation indicators and assessment methods are too simplistic and they only test students'

vocabulary and grammar skills, reading comprehension and writing ability, neglecting students' comprehensive language application skills. Listening, speaking, cross-cultural communication abilities are not fully reflected in the evaluation system and it also does not pay heed to the evaluation of students' all-round development and practical language skills.

3. Strategies and Pathways for Integrating Regional Culture into College English Course Delivery

3.1 Design Programs and Update Curriculum

To promote the integration of regional culture and foreign languages courses, local universities are supposed to plan, engage in top-down design, adjust talent training programs dynamically, and update the syllabus in a timely manner. The objectives, specifications, requirements, specific skillset, training characteristics, curriculum, course design and development, evaluation methods, quality standards, etc., are to be stipulated in the plan. In the formulation and revision of the professional talent training program, appropriate adjustments can be made to clarify the role and status of regional culture.

3.2 Take Advantage of Regional Characteristics and Develop School-based Teaching Materials

At present, most of the foreign language courses in Chinese universities use textbooks published by Shanghai Foreign Languages Education Press and Foreign Languages Teaching and Research Press. But the textbooks are oriented towards colleges and universities across the country, so they are not, in most cases, pertinent to regional culture as they do not specifically target local university students.

Zhang Wei (2017) believes that emphasizing local culture when delivering foreign languages courses helps students to compare Chinese and foreign languages and cultures. Students may establish a proper outlook on the world, withstand the test in cultural exchange, cultural integration, cultural assimilation, and cultural conflicts. Also, it helps to strengthen students' cultural confidence and fulfill their respective cultural missions.

As foreign languages instructors are fully aware, textbooks are carriers and prerequisite for teaching and learning. So the selection and compilation of textbook contents must go in line with the actual teaching conditions. Therefore, when compiling textbooks with regional characteristics, it is of great necessity to comprehensively consider factors such as local characteristics, university strategic positioning, and the needs of students. Students' daily life, unique regional culture and even provincial characteristics may all be considered when textbooks are compiled. Local cultural practitioners, cultural experts, staff of cultural institutions and curriculum development managers of universities may convene to build a team. They may discuss the training plans and layout of content of school-based textbooks.

3.3 Update Teaching Modes and Improve Students' Interest in Learning

Utilize blended teaching. With the advent of the era of artificial intelligence, people pay more and more attention to the application of modern information technology in the field of foreign languages education. Teachers can make full use of online interactive and learning platforms to provide students with a variety of high-quality open course resources for personalized and independent learning.

Front-line foreign languages instructors may consider participatory learning and research-based teaching method. The mode of student's explanation+teacher-students

discussion+teacher comment+teacher lecture may be adopted. In this case, students may take 15 minutes to explain regional cultural resources in foreign languages before class commences. Then questions will be raised by teacher and classmates for further discussion. Next, teachers will make relevant comments on the presentation and discussion. During this process, students are fully involved and this may help achieve better learning results.

Translation course instructors may integrate regional culture into their classes. In the case of the author's university, for instance, the translation course requires students to try translating the names of the cuisine in the cafeteria, especially those with regional characteristics. A certain amount of time is set aside in class for students to discuss what names are more accurate. This is an effective

measure to enhance students' understanding of regional culture.

The main goal of local universities is to serve the local economic and social development. Students are mainly from the province, so arranging students to present history and culture of their hometown in foreign languages is conducive to building their cultural confidence. In addition, it can effectively improve students' scientific research literacy. Before the presentation, students need to spend a lot of time and energy on research, in other words, they may have to consult, collect, organize and analyze various materials. Eventually, they select useful information, which undoubtedly improves students' engagement in research.

3.4 Develop Extracurricular Activities

There is no denying the fact that proper extracurricular activities go beyond academic studies, and they help build essential skills like leadership, teamwork, and interpersonal communication. These out-of-class activities are an extension, development and supplement of regular classroom learning. It is also an integral part of foreign languages curriculum, and it is also a powerful move for the effective development of practical learning. Extracurricular activities may be applied to carry out blended English learning activities, increase students' intrinsic motivation, enable them to obtain diversified information, and help them improve their comprehensive language communication skills. Teachers involved in the teaching of regional culture should capitalize on the rich and colorful local social and cultural resources for activities, so that students can truly feel the charm of the region during immersion in the authentic cultural experience.

Local universities may, on a regular basis, hold foreign languages competitions on the theme of regional culture. In the case of the author's university, students are encouraged to participate in a series of competitions, such as the Foreign Languages Competition of *Introducing Henan to the World*, the *Understanding Contemporary China Contests* by the Foreign Languages Teaching and Research Press, the *Short Video Contest of Telling Chinese Stories Well* hosted by the Higher Education Press, and the *Cross-Cultural Competence Competition* of the

Shanghai Foreign Languages Education Press. During the process of preparing for the competition, coaches integrate regional culture to generate students' interest in learning, galvanize teachers to engage in teaching reforms and improve intended learning outcomes.

Build more practical training bases. the author's university is situated in Anyang, the birthplace of earliest Chinese writings, so it explores regional cultural characteristics and builds a Chinese character cultural exploration center and a Yin Shang history & culture museum to enable students to practice their skills. the university attaches great importance to the overseas dissemination of Chinese culture, and it has been recognized as the provincial collaborative innovation center for overseas Chinese language dissemination and the Chinese character culture base at the provincial level for the international promotion of Chinese. the university is dedicated to building an exemplary center for the education of overseas Chinese communication intellectuals and has successively selected hundreds of volunteers to engage in international Chinese education. In this way, students get a precious opportunity to secure jobs in the international job market.

In addition, the school of foreign languages regularly organizes students to go to the birthplace of *Book of Changes*—Youli Townlet, the world cultural heritage—the Yin Ruins, the National Museum of Chinese Writings, the Red Flag Canal, etc., to conduct bilingual interpretation and training activities. This is meant to foster students' love for their home and country, rebuild their cultural confidence, and consolidate their ability to use English to spread Chinese voices.

3.5 Diversify Evaluation Methods

It is of great necessity to take full advantage of course assessment. the results may be used to fully enhance students' enthusiasm and motivation if formative and summative assessment methods are combined. From emphasizing outcomes over students' performances to emphasizing results while paying more attention to students' performances, concrete measures must be taken to increase the proportion of formative assessment and appropriately increase the contents of regional culture in teaching and

final examinations, so as to arouse students' sufficient attention.

In the case of the author's university, foreign languages instructors have effectively improved students' classroom engagement through blended teaching. They set students' course participation in quantitative forms, such as chapter task points, quizzes, group tasks, thematic discussions, and Q&A races. At the same time, students are strongly encouraged to produce and post in English on WeChat, and publish regional culture videos on social media such as Vlog, WeChat video accounts, WeChat official accounts, Bilibili, Tiktok, Kuaishou, etc. These posts count in students' performances, which effectively improves students' practical skills to recount regional cultures well in foreign languages.

4. Conclusion

The integration of regional culture into foreign languages courses can improve students' comprehensive literacy, effectively inculcate students' proper values about their family and country, help to enhance the soft power of local culture, and promote international discourse power of local culture. Local universities should be students-oriented, stress integration of regional culture into foreign languages courses, actively build a school-based teaching mode of regional culture, update the outdated curriculum, develop school-based teaching materials, diversify teaching methods, engage students in extracurricular activities, employ multiple assessment methods, promote the development of regional culture teaching in local universities, improve students' skills in using foreign languages to tell Chinese stories well, and prepare more qualified international talents to advance the Belt and Road Initiative.

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