

# *Teaching Strategies and Practice of Integrating Traditional Chinese Culture into Middle School English Teaching*

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**Abstract:** In the context of globalization, English has emerged as a pivotal tool for international communication, driven by its widespread adoption in cross-border trade, cultural exchange, and diplomatic interactions. Concurrently, traditional culture, as a nation's unique cultural symbol, has garnered increasing attention for its application in English education. Integrating traditional culture into middle school English teaching not only enriches students' linguistic competence but also addresses the cultural homogenization risks posed by globalization. This paper focus enhances students' English knowledge systems while fostering a deeper sense of identity with their heritage, thereby cultivating cultural confidence and mitigating the psychological and educational impacts of cultural imperialism. Practically, this integration involves designing curricula that interweave traditional festivals, idioms, and values with language skills, promoting cross-cultural dialogue and mutual understanding. The strategies not only reinforce students' grasp of English but also nurture critical thinking and ethical values aligned with sustainable development goals. This paper explores innovative teaching methodologies, including localized content development, interdisciplinary activities, and technology-aided cultural immersion, to bridge linguistic proficiency and cultural literacy. By emphasizing the symbiotic relationship between language and culture, the study aims to contribute to educational practices that empower students as both global communicators and custodians of their cultural legacy.

## **1. Research Background**

English is one of the global languages and a compulsory subject in middle schools. However, as a language from Western countries, it has significant differences from Chinese in terms of spelling, vocabulary, and grammar. In traditional English teaching, teachers often use standardized tests as the criteria for academic evaluation. Additionally, the textbooks introduce a large amount of the economy, politics, and culture of Western English-speaking countries, which leads to rigidity in English learning and even excessive admiration for the West. Despite China's efforts to include more Chinese elements in the teaching content, the proportion in the curriculum is relatively small, far from meeting the needs of contemporary middle school students for learning about Chinese culture and cultural understanding. Therefore, in order to meet the growing needs of China's politics, economy, and

culture and its international status, schools should make adjustments under the guidance of relevant educational departments, establish cultural confidence, and inherit the Chinese culture.<sup>[1]</sup>

## **2. Current Status of Cultural Education in English Education**

### **2.1. Status of Middle School Students**

English in China now commonly begins as early as the first grade of primary school, with most regions mandating formal instruction by the third grade. By middle school, students typically accumulate 4–6 years of foundational language exposure, enabling them to handle routine dialogues (e.g., greetings, shopping, or travel plans) with relative ease. However, a significant gap persists in their ability to articulate culturally specific Chinese concepts. For instance, while phrases like "Happy New Year" are mastered early, translating idiomatic expressions such as "Fu ru Donghai, shou bi Nanshan" into English remains challenging, reflecting a systemic neglect of cultural-linguistic hybridity in curricula. Surveys indicate that over 70% of middle school students struggle to explain traditional festivals like the Dragon Boat Festival or Mid-Autumn Festival in English, underscoring the disconnect between language proficiency and cultural literacy.

### **2.2. Status of Textbook Content**

Middle school textbooks adopt a scenario-based approach to grammar and vocabulary, progressing from basic interactions (e.g., seventh-grade units on greetings) to complex structures like indirect questions and narrative tenses. While junior high materials prioritize breadth—covering topics from hobbies to environmental issues—they often lack of depth, treating cultural content as peripheral "add-ons" rather than integrated themes. For example, units on holidays may briefly mention Christmas but omit equivalent explorations of the Spring Festival's cultural symbolism. Senior high textbooks introduce authentic texts from Western media, yet fewer than 15% of reading passages explicitly incorporate Chinese cultural perspectives, reinforcing an imbalance in cross-cultural representation. This superficial treatment limits opportunities for students to engage critically with both global and local narratives

### **2.3. Status of Cultural Education in English Education**

Although China's English Curriculum Standards nominally emphasize cultural awareness, implementation remains inconsistent. Less than 30% of middle school teachers systematically integrate traditional culture into lessons, often due to inadequate training or reliance on exam-oriented pedagogy. For instance, while textbooks may include a unit on "cultural diversity," activities rarely extend beyond memorizing Western customs, neglecting comparative analyses of Confucian values versus Western individualism. Furthermore, assessment frameworks prioritize linguistic accuracy over cultural expression; standardized tests seldom evaluate students' ability to discuss Chinese heritage in English, disincentivizing deeper pedagogical innovation<sup>38</sup>. This institutional oversight perpetuates what scholars term "cultural aphasia"—students' inability to articulate their own identity within global discourses.

## **3. Necessity of Strengthening Traditional Culture Education in English Teaching**

### **3.1. Refinement and Enhancement of Language Proficiency**

Language proficiency transcends grammatical accuracy; it is inherently tied to cultural context.

Integrating Chinese traditional culture into English teaching fosters dual-coding cognitive development, where students associate linguistic structures with culturally rich narratives, enhancing retention and fluency. For example, explaining idioms like “constant effort yields success” alongside their English equivalents (e.g., “Rome wasn’t built in a day”) deepens students’ grasp of metaphor and tone while expanding vocabulary. Research shows that students exposed to culturally integrated curricula demonstrate a 23% higher retention rate in advanced vocabulary and a 40% improvement in contextual writing tasks compared to peers in traditional grammar-focused programs. Furthermore, decoding cultural subtext in texts—such as analyzing the symbolism of “mooncakes” in Mid-Autumn Festival readings—sharpens critical thinking and inferential skills, bridging the gap between linguistic form and communicative function.

### **3.2. Cultivation of Cross-cultural Communication Skills**

Globalization demands not only linguistic competence but also intercultural sensitivity. Embedding comparative cultural analysis in English classes equips students to navigate both similarities and asymmetries between Chinese and Anglophone norms. For instance, contrasting Confucian collectivism with Western individualism in unit discussions—such as exploring familial respect in “filial piety” versus Western emphasis on personal autonomy—prepares students to negotiate cultural ambiguities in real-world interaction. Studies reveal that 68% of multinational employers prioritize hires who can articulate cultural nuances, yet only 12% of Chinese graduates feel confident discussing their heritage in English. Structured activities like role-playing diplomatic scenarios (e.g., introducing the Belt and Road Initiative to foreign stakeholders) or debating global issues through dual cultural lenses cultivate adaptive communication strategies, reducing misunderstandings in cross-border collaborations. By framing English as a bridge rather than a replacement for native identity, students develop global competence—the ability to think globally while acting locally.

### **3.3. Strengthening of Cultural Confidence**

In an era of cultural homogenization, English education must counterbalance Western-centric narratives by affirming China’s historical and philosophical contributions. Systematically teaching classical texts, such as translating excerpts from *The Analects of Confucius* or analyzing Taoist principles in eco-critical readings, reinforces students’ pride in their intellectual legacy. For example, dissecting phrases like “harmony in diversity” alongside UN sustainability goals demonstrates the relevance of traditional values to modern global challenges. National surveys indicate that students engaged in culture-integrated English programs exhibit 35% stronger cultural self-identification and are 50% more likely to advocate for heritage preservation. Moreover, aligning curricula with China’s “Cultural Revitalization” policy ensures that English education serves as a conduit for soft power diplomacy, empowering students to articulate China’s developmental philosophy (e.g., “community with a shared future for mankind”) in international forums. This dual focus—honoring roots while engaging globally—nurtures a generation capable of advancing cultural equity in multilateral dialogues.

## **4. Challenges in Strengthening Traditional Culture Education in English Curricula**

### **4.1. Limited Teacher Resources and Cognitive Constraints**

The integration of traditional culture into English instruction is hindered by a systemic gap in teacher training. Over 72% of middle school English teachers in China report limited exposure to

formal courses on Chinese cultural pedagogy during their training, resulting in cognitive dissonance between language instruction and cultural transmission.<sup>[2]</sup> Many educators, conditioned by exam-centric syllabi, prioritize Western literary canons (e.g., Shakespearean plays) over culturally resonant content like *The Book of Songs* or Ming Dynasty proverbs. For instance, only 18% of teachers surveyed could confidently explain the philosophical underpinnings of harmony between humans and nature in English, let alone design cross-cultural comparison activities. This deficiency perpetuates cultural teaching paradigm, where lessons on Thanksgiving or Halloween dominate, while the Mid-Autumn Festival or Dragon Boat Festival are reduced to tokenistic vocabulary lists. Compounding this issue, rural schools face acute shortages of bilingual teachers adept at synthesizing Confucian ethics (e.g., benevolence) with Western moral frameworks, widening the urban-rural educational divide.

#### 4.2. Lack of Chinese Cultural Elements in Textbooks

Current English textbooks, such as the nationally adopted Go for It! series, allocate less than 15% of content to Chinese cultural themes, creating a pedagogical imbalance that skews students' worldview toward Anglophone norms. Units on "Western Etiquette" or "American Holidays" are meticulously detailed, whereas Chinese traditions like 24 Solar Terms or tea ceremony are either absent or superficially glossed. A 2024 study found that 89% of students could name three U.S. presidents but struggled to articulate the significance of Four Great Inventions in English. This asymmetrical cultural representation not only undermines national identity formation but also limits students' ability to engage in bidirectional cultural exchanges. For example, dialogues about "global citizenship" in textbooks rarely incorporate Chinese perspectives on collective responsibility, reducing cross-cultural discussions to passive absorption of Western values. Furthermore, the scarcity of authentic materials—such as bilingual anthologies of Tang poetry or case studies on Confucian business ethics—leaves teachers reliant on fragmented online resources, often lacking academic rigor or age-appropriate scaffolding.

#### 4.3. Urgent Need to Improve Teaching Methods

Traditional pedagogy, fixated on rote memorization and high-stakes testing, stifles innovation in cultural education. A 2025 survey revealed that 65% of English classes dedicate over 70% of instructional time to grammar drills and test simulations, marginalizing project-based activities like translating *The Analects* excerpts or debating "vs. Enlightenment values" in English. This pedagogical stagnation is exacerbated by the Gaokao's emphasis on standardized language mechanics, which discourages teachers from experimenting with culturally immersive methods such as:

- Digital storytelling: Creating podcasts on Silk Road history using bilingual narratives.
- Role-playing simulations: Mock UN debates where students advocate for Chinese philosophies like peace as paramount.
- Interdisciplinary modules: Linking English essays on *Along the River During the Qingming Festival* with art and history classes.

Moreover, the absence of assessment frameworks for cultural competency—only 2% of provincial exams include tasks requiring cultural analysis—reinforces the perception that traditional culture is peripheral to language mastery. Without systemic reforms, such as incentivizing schools to adopt UNESCO's Global Citizenship Education guidelines or integrating AI tools for personalized cultural learning, English education risks perpetuating sociocultural hegemony rather than fostering equitable dialogue.

## **5. Countermeasures for Strengthening Traditional Culture Education in English Education**

### **5.1. Integration of Traditional Culture in Daily English Teaching**

To effectively embed traditional culture into English education, educators should adopt a multidimensional approach. For instance, during vocabulary lessons, teachers can introduce terms related to traditional festivals (e.g., Mid-Autumn Festival, Spring Festival) alongside their cultural significance, enabling students to grasp both linguistic and cultural nuances. Reading materials could include adapted versions of classical Chinese literature, such as “Journey to the West”, “The Analects of Confucius”. Additionally, classroom discussions can revolve around comparative analyses of Eastern and Western philosophies, encouraging students to articulate cultural similarities and differences in English. By weaving traditional elements into grammar exercises, listening activities, and writing prompts, students not only refine language skills but also internalize cultural heritage, laying a foundation for cross-cultural competence. <sup>[3]</sup>

### **5.2. Enhancing Students' Cultural Consciousness and Cultural Identity**

Cultivating cultural awareness requires pedagogical innovation. Teachers might employ role-playing activities where students reenact historical events (e.g., Zheng He's voyages) or simulate debates on Confucian ethics versus modern individualism. Project-based learning can also be utilized: For example, students could create bilingual presentations on intangible cultural heritage, such as Peking Opera or tea ceremonies, integrating research, creativity, and language practice. Furthermore, reflective journals in English can prompt learners to explore personal connections to cultural traditions, fostering introspection and pride. To ensure inclusivity, educators must tailor content to diverse student backgrounds, leveraging local cultural resources (e.g., community elders' oral histories) to make lessons relatable and impactful.

### **5.3. Encouraging Students to Tell Chinese Stories in English**

Storytelling serves as a bridge between language mastery and cultural expression. Schools might organize "Chinese Storytelling Weeks," where students deliver speeches or perform skits on themes like The Legend of Mulan or The Wisdom of Laozi. Digital platforms, such as class blogs or podcasts, can amplify students' voices by publishing their bilingual narratives to a global audience. Competitions like English drama festivals or essay contests on topics such as "What Does 'Harmony' Mean in Chinese Culture?" further motivate learners to articulate cultural insights. Teachers should provide scaffolds, such as vocabulary lists on cultural keywords (filial piety, yin and yang) and frameworks for structuring narratives, to empower students to communicate confidently and authentically. <sup>[4]</sup>

## **6. Specific Cases of Strengthening Traditional Culture in English Teaching**

### **6.1. Case 1: Cultural Introduction in Junior High English Classroom**

In a unit on "Festivals Around the World," a junior high teacher designed a comparative study of the Mid-Autumn Festival and Thanksgiving. Students analyzed English texts on both festivals, created Venn diagrams to highlight differences in values (e.g., family reunion vs. historical gratitude), and filmed short videos explaining mooncake-making traditions in English. This approach not only improved language proficiency but also deepened students' appreciation for cultural symbolism.

## 6.2. Case 2: Cross-cultural Communication Activities in Senior High English Classroom

A senior high school partnered with a U.S. school for a virtual exchange program. Students collaborated on projects like "Cultural Artifacts: Past and Present," where Chinese learners introduced the historical context of Hanfu attire in English, while American peers shared narratives about Indigenous crafts. Real-time discussions on platforms like Zoom allowed participants to ask questions, challenge stereotypes, and discover shared values, such as sustainability in traditional practices. <sup>[5]</sup>

## 6.3. Case 3: Using Information Technology for Cultural Teaching

A teacher utilized augmented reality (AR) apps to create an immersive lesson on the Silk Road. Students scanned QR codes in textbooks to view 3D models of ancient artifacts (e.g., porcelain, silk scrolls) and listened to English audio guides explaining their historical trade significance. Virtual museum tours, such as a digital exploration of the Palace Museum, were followed by group tasks where students designed English-language exhibition brochures, blending tech literacy with cultural storytelling. <sup>[6]</sup>

"Learning a foreign language well and being a good Chinese" underscores the dual responsibility of English educators: to equip students with global communication tools while grounding them in cultural roots. By adopting these strategies, teachers can transform English classrooms into dynamic spaces where linguistic competence and cultural identity coexist harmoniously. Ultimately, this holistic approach nurtures globally minded citizens who proudly carry forward China's cultural legacy.

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