

CULTURAL CONFIDENCE CONSTRUCTION OF CONTEMPORARY COLLEGE STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY OF ENGLISH MAJORS

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Abstract: In the context of accelerating globalization, a subset of English majors exhibit a marked deficiency in cultural confidence. Such deficiency predominantly manifests as an uncritical veneration of foreign cultures, cultural aphasia, inadequate comprehension of esteemed traditional culture, and insubstantial consciousness towards learning contemporary progressive culture. The multifaceted reasons contributing to this phenomenon encompass the influence of foreign culture, flaws in the education system, English major students' limited intercultural communication skills, the homogeneity of English teachers' knowledge base, and the inadequate incorporation of cultural confidence in curriculum planning. The question of how English majors can reinforce cultural confidence, advance its development, and undertake the historic task of disseminating the excellent traditional Chinese culture, within the prevailing education scenario, necessitates attention. This paper scrutinizes the current condition of cultural confidence among English majors, deliberates the underpinning reasons, and proposes strategies for fortifying English majors' cultural confidence.

Keywords: English majors; cultural confidence; fine traditional Chinese culture

1. Introduction

Culture constitutes the soul and bedrock of a country and a nation. Scholars present divergent perspectives regarding the notion of cultural confidence. Mr. Yunshan articulates that “cultural confidence implies a country, a nation, or a political party’s absolute endorsement of its cultural values and steadfast faith in its cultural vitality”[1]. On the contrary, Professor Liu Shilin portrays “cultural confidence as a distinctive cultural life function that transcends biological, natural, and realistic dimensions - a sophisticated cultural structure personalized by human social practices that signifies human initiative and cultural inventiveness” [2]. This paper posits that cultural confidence encapsulates the recognition and esteem towards a nation's traditional and modern culture, in addition to respect and tolerance for cultural diversity.

Cultural confidence is an embodiment of cultural identity and values. It offers critical support for a country or nation to sustain its independence and nurture distinctive cultural traits amidst global cultural interactions. Higher education institutions, as key sites for cultural confidence research, are instrumental in fostering cultural confidence. Cultural confidence embodies a nation's consciousness of its cultural ethos, its resolute identification,

and its dedication to conservation and innovation. It holds paramount importance in determining a nation's ascendancy or decline, securing cultural safety, and ensuring the independence of the national spirit. Robust cultural confidence is indispensable to preserve and enhance our nation's fine traditions, elevate our cultural sway, and bolster national power. With moral education underpinning university pedagogy, nurturing cultural confidence in English majors assists students in establishing apt cultural values and fosters a sense of mission in university English courses. Robust cultural confidence enables students to immerse in a cultural milieu, thereby deepening their cultural, national, and emotional identities.

2. Present State of Cultural Confidence Among English Major Students

Cultural confidence, a critical attribute for university students, positions English majors as proponents of advanced Chinese culture and champions of the Chinese spirit. However, in the face of globalization and the tide of cultural diversity, some English majors find themselves adrift, deficient in cultural confidence. This deficiency predominantly surfaces as blind adulation of foreign culture, cultural aphasia, insufficient understanding of exceptional traditional culture, and a lack of self-consciousness about contemporary advanced culture.

2.1 Blind Adoration of Foreign Cultures

In recent years, with the gradual deepening of cultural exchanges between China and the foreign countries and the mutual collision of diverse cultures, the cultural confidence of contemporary English majors is facing a great challenge. In the process of English-language learning, English majors are inevitably influenced mainly by European and American culture, and even show a blind admiration for Western culture. Some even ignore their local culture, which manifests itself in excessive worship of Western languages, festivals, values and lifestyles. Many English majors can speak fluent English and blurt out Western idioms and cultural backgrounds, while it is difficult for them to recall general knowledge of Chinese culture and traditional ancient poems. With the infiltration of Western culture, some English majors are more willing to celebrate Western festivals, such as Christmas, Halloween and Valentine's Day, which they consider more lively. While they consider traditional Chinese festivals such as The Tomb Sweeping Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, The Double Ninth Festival, and Mid-Autumn Festival as boring and less fresh, which ignores the deep cultural connotations behind traditional festivals. In terms of values, English majors are greatly influenced by Western values, and the values conveyed by Hollywood movies, British and American dramas, etc. that are mostly heroism, money, individualism and hedonism, which gradually corrupt students' values and implicitly become their pursuit goals. The Chinese tradition of hard work, solidarity and collectivism has been weakened.

2.2 Presence of Cultural Aphasia

Cultural aphasia amongst English majors alludes to the impediments in eloquently articulating Chinese culture. This is discernible in their subpar abilities to communicate native Chinese culture to foreign counterparts, leading to shortcomings in the precise and fluent conveyance of cultural insights. Such manifestations include a dearth of cultural knowledge, substandard proficiency in expressing native culture in English, and limited inclination towards cultural expression. Many English major students display an underwhelming knowledge of Chinese classics, poems, literary texts, and cultural knowledge, often disregarding them as inconsequential. The exposure to foreign culture often overshadows the significance of Chinese culture in their studies. English majors lack a structured approach to assimilating English expressions of Chinese culture, leading to deficiencies in understanding and expressing Chinese cultural nuances. For instance, their unfamiliarity with cultural

terminologies becomes apparent when they struggle to introduce Confucian ideologies in English. Students typically express a higher preference for Western cultural topics, considering them more contemporary and intriguing. Concurrently, the infrequency and perceived complexity of native language vocabulary in examinations discourage students from investing efforts in understanding and expressing it.

2.3 Neglect of Fine Traditional Culture

Fine traditional culture, as the cornerstone and soul of Chinese civilization, often remains underestimated and detached from contemporary English majors. Their indifference towards traditional culture manifests in their lack of interest, insufficient knowledge, and scant concern. The majority of students exhibit limited enthusiasm for traditional culture, rarely incorporating it into their daily routines. A meager proportion of students display a robust interest in traditional culture, demonstrating proficiency and passion. Collectively, English students display an inadequate understanding of traditional culture, often harbouring partial and vague concepts.

2.4 Deficient Self-consciousness in Pursuing Contemporary Advanced Culture

The advanced culture of contemporary China, a socialist culture imbued with Chinese characteristics and underpinned by Marxism, aims to cultivate citizens with ideals, morality, culture, and discipline. This culture is geared towards modernization, global future, and is scientifically oriented towards the masses. The propagation of advanced culture serves to reflect the demands of contemporary times and the spiritual needs of contemporary China, driving the societal growth of China. English majors should champion and practice this advanced culture, embodying the Chinese spirit. However, despite their general progressive attitude, advocacy for moral civilization, and conscious resistance to backward cultures, some English majors exhibit a lack of initiative and interest in advanced culture. Some students display a lackadaisical attitude towards school-offered ideological and political courses, treating them as self-study classes, and often missing classes due to attendance policies. Some students confess to their confounded state, struggling to find their spiritual destination and grappling with the conflict between ideals and reality, individual and society, rationality and faith. They feel coerced into learning mainstream culture, rather than voluntarily seeking to learn and spread excellent local culture and advanced culture.

3. Analysis of Factors Contributing to the Lack of Cultural Confidence Among English College Students

3.1 Impact of Foreign Cultural Influx on Cultural Propriety

In recent years, increased Sino-foreign exchange activities have facilitated the influx of foreign culture. Given their study circumstance, English majors are prone to foreign cultural exposure. In scenarios where cultural standards are not firmly established, and understanding of Chinese traditional culture is deficient, students may perceive Chinese culture as inferior to foreign cultures, leading to a deficiency in cultural confidence.

3.2 Imperfections in the Educational System and Divergences in Educational Philosophy

Currently, there is a lack of an established campus culture imbued with Chinese cultural characteristics [3]. Higher education institutions, in their pursuit of talent cultivation, focus more on nurturing student' scientific literacy. Driven by utilitarian educational ideologies and learning approaches, these institutions often overlook the significance of humanistic and quality education, as well as the cultivation of cultural confidence among students in their curriculum design and environment development. This disregard has resulted in a deficiency in cultural faith, confidence, and pride among college students, particularly those majoring in English.

3.3 Weak Intercultural Communication Competencies and Insufficient Cultural Awareness Among English Majors

Professor Cong Cong introduced the term “Chinese Cultural Aphasia” in 2000. It refers to the inability of many Chinese English learners, including those with high English proficiency, to accurately and fluently express Chinese culture in English during cross-cultural communication, failing to demonstrate their deep cultural understanding and independent cultural identity[4]. Due to their major’s characteristics, English students have more opportunities to engage with Western culture. With the rapid evolution of the Internet and information technology, a considerable amount of information permeates all aspects of their studies and lives. If these students lack the critical skill of discerning correct information from misleading content, they become susceptible to Western ideology, leading to an unwarranted glorification of Western culture and denigration of Chinese culture, significantly impacting their cultural self-confidence. Additionally, English major’ lack of knowledge of traditional culture and the absence of a drive to enhance their cultural self-confidence impede the establishment of a robust foundation for their cultural confidence.

3.4 Single-Faceted Knowledge Base of English Teachers and the Need for Holistic Enhancement of Cultural Literacy

On one hand, higher education institutions' weak emphasis on arts and literature education cannot be ignored any longer, with these institutions frequently neglecting quality education for students. On the other hand, due to professional influences, English teachers often have a greater understanding of foreign cultures than traditional Chinese culture. As crucial intermediaries for the integration of Chinese and foreign cultures, the failure of English teachers to fully grasp Chinese culture and comprehend its connotations results in an absence of Chinese cultural transmission in their teaching activities. Furthermore, teachers' insufficient understanding of professional teaching objectives contributes to the deficiency in cultural confidence among English college students. English teachers who exclusively concentrate on language knowledge and foreign culture transmission and place value only on the instrumental facets of language, neglecting its humanistic aspects, hinder students from fully comprehending cultural confidence and developing a genuine affection for Chinese culture.

3.5 Inadequate Incorporation of Cultural Confidence in Curriculum Design

Presently, many colleges and universities lack stringent regulations on integrating cultural selfconfidence cultivation with curriculum teaching, meaning a mechanism for normalizing such cultivation within curriculum teaching has not been established comprehensively. The Opinions on the Reform of Undergraduate Education for Foreign Language Majors in the 21st Century explicitly states that for English majors, greater attention should be given to instilling patriotism and collectivism, cultivating students' policy acumen and organizational discipline, and enhancing students' capacity to critically absorb global cultural essence while inheriting and promoting exceptional traditional Chinese culture. Although some courses, such as an outline of Chinese culture and modern Chinese, have been added to the curriculum for English majors in colleges and universities, and some elements of Chinese culture have been incorporated into English majors' textbooks, these students are still unable to fluently express Chinese culture in cross-cultural communication. Additionally, with the rapid societal development and accelerating modernization of Chinese culture, the curriculum design and textbook compilation for English majors need continual updates to meet the higher requirements of cultural confidence.

4. Strategies for Fostering Cultural Confidence on English Majors

Given the barriers to the cultivation of cultural confidence among English majors, it's important to devise strategies that can foster their cultural confidence. Below are a few proposed strategies:

4.1 Promote Cultural Education and Develop Chinese Cultural Courses

Strengthening cultural education and emphasizing the integration of culture in language teaching should be prioritized. The design of specialized Chinese cultural courses is recommended to ensure English majors can access a systematic and comprehensive overview of Chinese culture. Simultaneously, these courses should encourage students to compare Chinese and foreign cultures, further enhancing their intercultural communication competence.

4.2 Enhance Teachers' Understanding of Chinese Culture

Cultural confidence cannot be separated from the guidance and education of teachers. Whether teachers' own cultural heritage is rich and their theoretical foundation is solid are very important to the education of cultural confidence in the classroom [5]. Institutions should organize regular trainings, workshops, and seminars to ensure English teachers have a deep understanding of Chinese culture. This will enable them to effectively integrate Chinese cultural elements into their teaching and, therefore, cultivate students' cultural confidence. Teachers in higher education should place emphasis on helping students understand the cultural differences between China and the West in the curriculum, cultivating students' international perspectives, and enhancing English college students' culture-based concepts. Through this way, English majors could be cultivated an international perspective, so that they can better view Chinese culture from a global perspective and thus develop their own cultural confidence [6].

4.3 Strengthen English Curriculum Design and Update Textbooks

The importance of including cultural elements in the English curriculum cannot be overstated. Higher education institutions should modify existing curriculum designs and textbook content to incorporate elements of Chinese culture more comprehensively. This integration would offer students a broader and more detailed exposure to Chinese culture, thereby fostering their cultural confidence.

4.4 Cultivate Students' Critical Thinking and Discernment

Educational institutions should focus on cultivating students' critical thinking and discernment abilities to help them navigate the deluge of information in the digital age. With improved critical thinking skills, students can differentiate between accurate and misleading content, preventing them from blindly glorifying Western culture or denigrating Chinese culture.

4.5 Foster a Strong Cultural Atmosphere on Campus

Higher education institutions should strive to foster a vibrant cultural atmosphere on campus. This can be achieved by organizing cultural events and activities that immerse students in Chinese culture, making it a part of their daily lives. Creating an environment imbued with Chinese cultural characteristics can enhance students' cultural identity and self-confidence.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the lack of cultural confidence amongst English majors is multifaceted, stemming from the influence of foreign culture and their insufficient engagement and comprehension of their native culture. As eloquently expressed by President Xi Jinping, cultural confidence represents a deep, comprehensive, and

fundamental belief. Rooted in over 5,000 years of Chinese civilization and enriched by revolutionary culture and advanced socialist culture, it encapsulates the profound spiritual pursuits of the Chinese nation and forms the unique spiritual identity of the Chinese people [7]. The role of cultural confidence in national development and the continuation of national spirit is undeniable.

As conduits of cultural exchange between China and foreign countries, English majors profoundly affect the broader national and cultural landscape. Therefore, nurturing their cultural confidence is a task of significant importance. The cultivation of cultural confidence in English majors necessitates concerted efforts, incorporating appropriate measures, and a comprehensive approach that involves society, educational institutions, educators, and the students themselves. Building an environment that reveres traditional Chinese culture, revolutionary culture, and advanced socialist culture is crucial. It enhances their understanding of Chinese culture while fostering an international perspective. Only through such comprehensive and multi-faceted approaches can we empower English majors to strengthen their cultural confidence, ultimately enabling them to become effective cultural ambassadors in a global context.

Acknowledgments

This work was financially supported by Undergraduate Innovation and Entrepreneurship Training Program of Sichuan Province: Research on Construction of University Students' Cultural Confidence: A Case Study of English Major Students (S202310621099).

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