

CHINESE CULTURAL APHASIA
IN CHINA'S COLLEGE ENGLISH EDUCATION

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CHINESE CULTURAL APHASIA
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Abstract

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Under the Supervision of Kimberly D. Tuescher, PhD

China develops rapidly, and more and more foreigners begin to learn Chinese and Chinese culture. When foreigners are curious to ask questions about Chinese culture, many Chinese find it difficult to express their thoughts accurately. Obviously, Chinese people know quite a lot about Chinese culture, but just fail to describe them in the English language. As educators, it is a great task to research this topic. Cong Cong, a Chinese professor, named this phenomenon Chinese cultural aphasia in 2000. China pays great attention to English education, but the problem exists.

This paper reviews some related literature, which does show Chinese cultural aphasia exists. Many researchers are studying on this topic. The author, as a college educator, is curious about this phenomenon. She wanted to find out to what extent Chinese cultural aphasia exists in colleges especially in Yiwu. The result of the investigation would be helpful for the school to set courses or choose teaching materials. Therefore, her advice for doing a questionnaire among English majors was supported by the school where she taught. This author administered and collected the printed questionnaire with the assistance of monitors of the classes. With the software Microsoft Excel, the data of the questionnaire is analyzed. The questionnaire revealed

the existing of Chinese cultural aphasia. As a result, educators or researchers should think about what causes this phenomenon and what educators can do to help students counter it. Some measures should be taken to help solve the problem.

This paper reviews the literature in order to find to what extent Chinese cultural aphasia exists especially in Yiwu. An investigation, including an analysis of the questionnaire data is presented, and conclusions and recommendations are made.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

The English language has become a global language. Therefore, English is not necessarily related with cultures of English-speaking countries, but also with cultures of all countries. English language “loads the cultures” of learners’ own countries, despite the native language is English or not, as long as they use English language. That is the same case in China. Chinese people express Chinese culture in English language when communicating with foreign guests.

As China’s economy develops, intercultural communication becomes more important. Indeed, English is a world language. People from different countries communicate in English. China government pays great attention to English education and supports it in many aspects. People of all walks, of all ages learn English. As a course, English is very important in all phases of school education.

In China’s English education, the study of western culture is given attention. Students learn the language as well as the culture. However, the native culture, that is, Chinese culture, is ignored. Although all are Chinese, and know Chinese culture well, often people cannot express the culture appropriately in English. Meanwhile, more and more people in the world are learning Chinese and Chinese culture. With a good command of Chinese culture, one can communicate with foreigners more easily and can also spread the culture.

To change Chinese cultural aphasia, and better the quality of English education, possible causes should be found out and ways to solve this phenomenon. It is a very important task for educators. The paper would focus on the causes of Chinese cultural aphasia and what educators could do to help change the phenomenon to some extent.

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in the paper is, “What is cultural aphasia?” “To what extent does Chinese cultural aphasia exist?” “What causes cultural aphasia?” “How can Chinese educators help students counter this phenomenon?”

Definition of Terms

Culture. Culture is the lifestyle and its reflections of the community who share a particular language (Newmark, 1988).

Cultural aphasia. This phenomenon, Chinese cultural aphasia, was developed by Chinese Professor Cong Cong (2000) when she taught her doctoral students practical English teaching on academic exchange. The course of teaching shows that even doctors, who hold the highest diploma, have difficulties in expressing Chinese culture in English language. The term, Chinese cultural aphasia, is a phenomenon that Chinese people cannot express Chinese culture correctly in target language. Here, the target language is the English language.

Cultural relativism. According to the theory of Cultural Relativism by Boas (1911), every culture is equal. No culture is superior or inferior to others.

Acronyms used in the paper:

PRETCO-B. PRETCO-B is short for Practical English Test for Colleges, Level B.

CET-4. CET-4 is short for English Test for Colleges, Band 4.

CET-6. CET-6 is short for English Test for Colleges, Band 6.

TOEFL. TOEFL is short for The Test of English as a Foreign Language.

IELTS. IELTS is short for International English Language Testing System.

GRE. GRE is short for Graduate Record Examination.

Delimitations of Research

The research focuses on Chinese cultural aphasia. The statistics are from colleges in China. The research is made to promote Chinese education to some extent in the future. The research for this seminar paper was conducted over a period of ninety days using journals, books and website databases. A questionnaire was made in Yiwu Industrial and Commercial College last year. The subject was all English majors. It could tell the situation of Yiwu Industrial and Commercial College. It might be the similar case in other colleges. But obviously it cannot represent all the colleges in China. The search tools utilized are *the library of Yiwu Industrial and Commercial College, Karrmann Library of University of Wisconsin-Platteville, China National Knowledge Internet, EBSCOHOST, Google*. Key words for the searches are *culture, language, Chinese cultural aphasia, culture education*.

Method of Approach

For this research, how the Chinese people with cultural aphasia behave is investigated. A survey was carried out. The author designed a questionnaire to collect some statistics. The subjects for the questionnaire were all college students majoring in English in Yiwu Industrial and Commercial College. The questions were multiple choices. The author analyzed the data by using Microsoft Excel. Through analyzing the data, the percentage of every choice for each

question was clear. The data offered is intended to be helpful to the research.

The questionnaire was carried out in 2010. It was carried out as follows:

1. September 20th to October 15th, design and revise the questionnaire.
2. October 16th to November 11th, give out and collect the questionnaire.
3. November 12th to December 8th, collect data and count this percentage of every item.
4. November 9th to December 30th, analyze each item.

Chapter 2 Review of Related Literature

Introduction: Language and Culture

Language describes loads and symbols culture. Language and culture cannot be divided. (Kramersch C, 1993) As is said by Newmark (1988), culture is the lifestyle and its reflections of the community who share a particular language. Culture has a very close relationship with language. It is now widely acknowledged that western culture should be concerned during the course of English language teaching. At present, western culture is a focus of attention. Students learn the language as well as the culture.

English learners are increasing throughout the world. English language has become a global language. Therefore, English is not necessarily related with cultures of English-speaking countries. Native culture is what people express in English language. English language loads the cultures of learners' own countries, despite the native language is English or not, as long as they use English language. That is the same case in China. Chinese people express Chinese culture in English language when communicating with foreign guests.

Chinese Learning Abroad

China develops rapidly. Chinese and Chinese culture becomes very popular throughout the world. Chinese subject is set up in more than 2300 colleges in 85 countries. About 30,000,000 foreigners are learning Chinese, and the number of learning Chinese is still increasing. (Yan, X., 2009) When Westerners are interested in Chinese culture and inquire about it, one should introduce it to them in fluent English. So it is necessary and important for Chinese people to learn Chinese culture well especially in English language. The atmosphere offers a

good platform for intercultural communication.

China's English Education

As China's economy develops, intercultural communication becomes more prominent. English is a world language. People from different countries communicate in English. China government pays great attention to English education and supports it in many aspects. People of all walks, of all ages learn English. As a subject, English is very important in all phases of school education.

Culture Education

According to the theory of Cultural Relativism by Franz Boas (1911), every culture is equal. No culture is superior or inferior to others. Chinese learners learn English, not because whether the culture is superior or not. It is the need for communication. When learning a language, bear in mind the principal of cultural relativism. Western culture and Chinese culture are of equal value.

As is said by Hall (1959) in his works *The Silent Language*, one could learn the culture of other countries not only to understand foreign culture, but also to understand one's own culture through learning. Therefore, one can have a much better understanding of Chinese culture through the course of western culture learning.

Aphasia of Chinese culture

The ignorance of the native culture, that is, Chinese culture, was developed by Chinese Professor Cong, C. (2000) when she taught her doctoral students practical English teaching on academic exchange. The process of her teaching reveals that even doctors, who hold the highest diploma, have difficulties in expressing Chinese culture in English language. In China's English teaching, Chinese cultural aphasia is a major problem and is quite common.

According to the survey made by the researcher Zhou W. (2009), the subjects of the survey were those who had learned English for at least 16 years and 97% had passed TEM-4 and 74% had passed TEM-8. Moreover, they all had been taught by foreign teachers from English-speaking countries. However, the survey showed that 79% of students were unable to describe Confucianism and 82% of students could not describe Taoism. When questioned which topic they were confident of, 74% of the students declared they were more confident of Chinese culture, because they were born and lived in China, and thus were very familiar with native culture; paradoxically, 68% of the students said they found Chinese culture most difficult to introduce in English. These results are astonishing and depressing. Topics about Chinese traditional culture are interesting and favorite ones to westerners when they meet native Chinese speakers. They would certainly be very disappointed.

Methodology of culture education

In the culture education of foreign languages, western researchers have done many experiments, providing many good education examples and suggestions. It was recommended by Byram (1989) that separate courses about culture should be set up in foreign language education. Kramersch (1993) encouraged others to teach culture in the course of foreign language education.

In textbooks, content about Chinese culture is rare. A survey in Ningbo showed that only 2% of the content was concerned with Chinese culture (Bo, X., 2007). As is recommended by researchers, such as Yan, X.(2009), supplementary materials about Chinese culture are also good for learning Chinese culture, for example, *Moments in Peking* and *The Art of Living* by Lin Yutang, *The Good Earth* by Pearl Buck; *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan, *Analects of Confucius* translated by Arthur Waley.

Summary

In our current time, more and more people in the world are learning Chinese language and Chinese culture. In such an atmosphere, with a good command of Chinese culture, one can communicate with foreigners more easily and can also spread our culture. Chinese cultural aphasia must be changed. It is a barrier for intercultural communication. English educators in China should realize the importance of Chinese culture education in English language.

Many researchers are studying on Chinese cultural aphasia. The author, as a college educator, conducted an investigation with the use of a questionnaire. The questionnaire revealed that Chinese cultural aphasia exists in colleges. Educators or researchers should think about what causes this phenomenon and what can be done to help students counter it. Measures should be taken to help solve the problem.

Chapter 3 Questionnaire Analysis

Aim

The aim is to determine the extent Chinese cultural aphasia exists among college students especially in Yiwu Industrial and Commercial College, and to know students' needs. As a result, the author designed and conducted a questionnaire to collect some statistics regarding this issue.

Subjects

The subjects for the questionnaire were all English major sophomores and juniors in Yiwu Industrial and Commercial College. The total number of subjects was 355.

Yiwu Industrial and Commercial College is a higher vocational college. It is a three-year college. The sophomores and juniors have studied as English majors for one or two years. There are two foreign teachers teaching them Oral English. Many of them have passed CET-4 and some have passed CET-6.

Procedure

The questionnaire was carried out in 2010. It was carried out as follows:

1. September 20th to October 15th, design and revise the questionnaire.
2. October 16th to November 11th, distribute and collect the questionnaire.
3. November 12th to December 8th, collect data and count this percentage of every item.
4. November 9th to December 30th, analyze each item.

Protocol

The questionnaire was analyzed both manually and by using Microsoft Excel.

Questionnaire Data

Table 1

To What Extent Participants Know about Chinese Culture

Item	Number	Percentage
Know it very well	28	7.89%
Know it well	263	74.08%
Know very little	64	18.03%

Table 2

Whether Or Not Participants Could Introduce Chinese Culture in English

Item	Number	Percentage
Yes	18	5.07%
No	337	94.93%

Table 3

Chinese Culture in Textbooks

Item	Number	Percentage
There are many courses mentioned Chinese culture	22	6.20%
There are not much	226	63.66%
None, but teachers would mention some	77	21.69%
None, neither would teachers mention it	30	8.45%

Table 4

Awareness of Chinese Culture in English Textbooks

Item	Number	Percentage
Pay special attention to it	60	16.90%
Just look it through quickly	262	73.80%
Just skip it	33	9.30%

Table 5

Whether Or Not It Is Necessary to Infiltrate Chinese Culture into English Textbooks

Item	Number	Percentage
Necessary	285	80.28%
Unnecessary	26	7.32%
Do not care	44	12.39%

Table 6

Contents Hope to Be Added into the Textbooks

Item	Number	Percentage
Courtesy	251	70.70%
Drama	130	36.62%
Education	177	49.86%
Custom	287	80.85%

History	232	65.35%
Diet	243	68.45%
Others	25	7.04%

Table 7

Textbooks Which Should Mention More Chinese Culture

Item	Number	Percentage
Comprehensive English	252	70.99%
Chinese English Mutual Translation	189	53.24%
English Reading	239	67.32%
English Writing	116	32.68%
English Listening and Speaking	170	47.89%
Others	17	4.79%

Table 8

Whether Or Not It Is Necessary to Add a New Course about Chinese Culture in the English Language

Item	Number	Percentage
Necessary	266	74.93%
Unnecessary	36	10.14%
Do not care	53	14.93%

Table 9

Advantages to Have Chinese Culture in Textbooks Or Courses

Item	Number	Percentage
It can help learners understand Chinese culture much better	256	72.11%
It can help spread Chinese culture to foreigners much better	312	87.89%
It can help improve learners' English ability	242	68.17%
Others	20	5.63%

Results

The result of the questionnaire shows the extent Chinese cultural aphasia exists among the college students and students' thoughts about Chinese culture.

Table 1 and Table 2 show that though 7.89% and 74.08% of the participants doing the questionnaire declare they know Chinese culture very well, 94.93% of the students could not introduce Chinese culture such as *the hundred schools of thought* and their exponents, the 24 solar terms, *the Silk Road* in English.

As is seen from Table 4, regarding Chinese culture in the textbooks, 63.66% of them declare there is not much Chinese culture. When they come across Chinese culture, 78.3% of the students just look it through quickly, only 16.9% pay special attention to it, while the rest, 9.3% just skip it.

80.28% feel it is necessary to infiltrate Chinese culture into English textbooks. The most interesting of the content is custom, courtesy, history and diet. The second most interesting kind

is drama and education. Courses such as Comprehensive English, English Reading, Chinese English Mutual Translation, English Listening and Speaking are preferred to add more Chinese culture. Regarding adding a new course about Chinese culture in English language, 74.93% are positive.

According to the questionnaire, there are at least three advantages to add Chinese culture into textbooks or set up a course:

- It can help spread Chinese culture to foreigners much better.
- It can help learners understand Chinese culture much better.
- It can help improve learners' English ability.

Chapter 4 Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the review of existing literature related to CHINESE CULTURAL APHASIA IN CHINA'S COLLEGE ENGLISH EDUCATION, the following conclusions can be drawn.

Though Chinese people know a lot of Chinese and Chinese culture, many people still fail to express the native culture in English language. Chinese cultural aphasia does exist.

There are possible causes that educators pay more attention to western cultures than native culture, students are not aware of getting native culture in the English language. Students can get high score in written test, but are not skilled in speaking Chinese culture in English.

From the questionnaire done in Yiwu Industrial and Commercial College, the result demonstrated that Chinese cultural aphasia exists in colleges, at least in Yiwu Industrial and Commercial College. Students do not receive enough information about Chinese culture in English either from textbooks or classroom teaching. Most of the students really hope to get more information about Chinese culture in English.

Based on these conclusions and findings, it is recommended that educators or researchers should take some measures to help students counter Chinese cultural aphasia. College teachers could infiltrate Chinese culture into the teaching of English language or western cultures, if possible, set some selective courses about Chinese culture in English.

With a good command of English language and Chinese culture in the language of English, Chinese people could spread the native culture when communicating with foreign guests.

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Appendix

Questionnaire about Chinese Culture

1. How much do you know about Chinese culture?
 - A. Know it very well.
 - B. Know it well.
 - C. Know very little.
2. Can you introduce Chinese culture such as *Baijiazhengming*, *24 Jieqi*, *Sichouzhilu* in English?
 - A. Yes.
 - B. No.
3. Is there any Chinese culture in your textbooks for English majors?
 - A. Yes, there are many courses mentioned Chinese culture.
 - B. Yes, there are not much.
 - C. No, but teachers would mention some.
 - D. No, neither would teachers mention it.
4. Do you pay some attention to Chinese culture in English textbooks?
 - A. I pay special attention to it.
 - B. I just look it through quickly.
 - C. I just skip it.
5. Do you think it is necessary to infiltrate Chinese culture into English textbooks?
 - A. Yes.

B. No.

C. Both are OK. I do not care.

6. If necessary, what kind of contents do you hope to be added into the textbooks? (You may choose more than one.)

A. Courtesy.

B. Drama.

C. Education.

D. Custom.

E. History.

F. Diet.

G. Others _____

7. What textbooks do you think should mention more Chinese culture? (You may choose more than one.)

A. Comprehensive English.

B. Chinese English Mutual Translation.

C. English Reading.

D. English Writing.

E. English Listening and Speaking.

F. Others _____

8. Do you think it is necessary to add a new course about Chinese culture in the English language?

A. Yes.

B. No.

C. Both are OK. I do not care.

9. What advantages do you think are there to add Chinese culture in textbooks or courses? (You may choose more than one.)

A. It can help learners understand Chinese culture much better.

B. It can help spread Chinese culture to foreigners much better.

C. It can help improve learners' English ability.

D. Others _____