

# **Tell China's story in English — — Research on strategies for integrating excellent traditional Chinese culture into primary school English teaching**

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**Abstract:** *As the core competencies in English education and the new curriculum standards are progressively implemented, primary school English teachers have recognized the importance of integrating excellent traditional Chinese culture into their teaching. However, the integration of this culture in practice has not been as effective as expected. This paper explores the significance of incorporating excellent traditional Chinese culture into primary school English teaching, analyzes the current state and reasons for cultural integration, and investigates strategies to enhance the effective integration and penetration of this culture in teaching. The goal is to improve students' cross-cultural communication skills, strengthen their cultural and national confidence, and support the inheritance and promotion of excellent traditional Chinese culture.*

**Key words:** *excellent traditional Chinese culture; primary school English teaching; strategy*

## **1. Introduction**

President Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasized at important meetings the importance of vividly telling China's stories and actively spreading China's voice. The excellent traditional Chinese culture is the source and soul of these stories, fully reflecting the unique style and characteristics of the nation and its people. In today's context, integrating this rich cultural heritage into primary school English education is not only a necessary step in response to new curriculum standards and reforms but also a crucial step in advancing the 'going out' strategy of Chinese culture.' In the new era, how can we better leverage the educational role of the English language, making it a bridge for cultural exchange and personal development, and fostering students' national sentiment and cultural confidence? This requires primary school English teachers to be bold in innovation and exploration.' <sup>[1]</sup>

## **2. The significance of integrating excellent traditional Chinese culture into primary school English teaching**

### **2.1. It is conducive to enriching teaching content and obtaining positive learning experience**

In primary school English education, teachers typically focus on the textbook content, which can be overly monotonous. The limited and restricted nature of English textbooks fails to meet students' diverse learning needs. Integrating excellent traditional Chinese culture into English teaching can enrich the curriculum, broaden students' learning resources, and expand their cultural horizons, allowing them to explore and learn more extracurricular cultural knowledge. Due to differences in language environments and personal life experiences, primary school students often face challenges in understanding English.

Excellent traditional Chinese culture is deeply rooted in our daily lives and closely tied to students' real-life experiences, making it a culturally relatable subject. By effectively integrating this content into teaching, it can resonate with students, helping them better understand the language and leading to a more positive learning experience. A rich curriculum and a positive learning experience can boost students' interest in learning English, ignite their passion for learning, and encourage them to explore actively.

## ***2.2. It is conducive to enhancing cultural awareness and developing intercultural communication skills***

The English language and culture are closely intertwined. Learning English involves not only acquiring language knowledge but also gaining cultural insights. English is the target language for students, and through their studies, they naturally develop a deeper understanding of English culture. In contrast, exposure to their native culture is much less. The 'Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards' (2022 Edition) emphasizes that English courses should cultivate students' core competencies, including language skills, cultural awareness, thinking qualities, and learning abilities, with cultural awareness reflecting the value orientation of these core competencies.<sup>[2]</sup> Integrating excellent traditional Chinese culture into primary school English teaching aligns with the core competency philosophy of the English curriculum, enhancing students' cultural awareness and deepening their understanding and appreciation of their native culture. English is a language widely used in various fields globally, serving as a vital bridge for international communication and cooperation. 'Since English is a foreign language, it inevitably involves' cross-cultural 'issues.'<sup>[3]</sup> Only by truly understanding and grasping the cultural essence of both the native and target languages can effective cross-cultural communication be achieved. Integrating excellent traditional Chinese culture into teaching provides students with a solid foundation and a rich cultural background, which helps develop their cross-cultural communication skills.

## ***2.3. It is conducive to strengthening cultural confidence and carrying forward and inheriting the fine traditional Chinese culture***

The excellent traditional Chinese culture, a treasure of wisdom accumulated and refined over the long course of history, has a profound impact and significant meaning on China's development, and it is worth promoting and inheriting. Education is a crucial means of spreading and promoting culture. Integrating the excellent traditional Chinese culture into primary school English teaching, through teachers' guidance, allows students to deeply experience the differences and similarities between Chinese and foreign cultures, thereby more clearly recognizing their own identity. This helps students remember their roots, uphold their original intentions, cultivate a sense of patriotism, and deepen their understanding, respect, and recognition of their national culture. Moreover, the charm of the excellent traditional Chinese culture can ignite students' pride and love for their local culture, which helps to strengthen their cultural confidence. Students are not only the subjects of learning but also the promoters and inheritors of culture. Their love for the country and culture is conducive to promoting and inheriting the excellent traditional Chinese culture.

## **3. The current situation and cause analysis of integrating excellent traditional Chinese culture into primary school English teaching**

### ***3.1. The current situation of integrating excellent traditional Chinese culture into primary school English teaching***

#### ***3.1.1. The selection of culture is dominated by English culture, while the excellent traditional Chinese culture is neglected***

In recent years, with the ongoing curriculum reform and the introduction of core competencies in English, English teachers have increasingly recognized the importance and necessity of fostering students' cultural awareness. In their teaching, they integrate relevant cultural knowledge into the curriculum as appropriate. Since most English teachers are more familiar with English culture, they tend to select cultural materials that align with this context. Only when the teaching content involves Chinese culture, do they choose materials from China's excellent traditional culture as supplementary resources.

#### ***3.1.2. The integration method is not scientific, and the use of excellent traditional Chinese culture is insufficient***

In today's English teaching, teachers often only provide superficial explanations of Chinese traditional culture through oral lectures or simple illustrations and videos, without delving into a deeper understanding and study of the culture. This unscientific approach not only fails to fully utilize cultural resources and effectively leverage the role of Chinese traditional culture but also fails to convey the true significance of cultural integration. As a result, students can only scratch the surface of the rich cultural heritage, unable to truly appreciate its depth. Furthermore, some teachers fail to effectively integrate Chinese traditional cultural resources into their teaching content, often due to a lack of relevance between the resources and the teaching content, as well as an inability to align the resources with English teaching objectives and students' actual needs, leading to poor cultural integration outcomes.

#### ***3.1.3. The teaching results emphasize the use of English language, but neglect the output of excellent traditional Chinese culture***

In the suggestions for evaluating the implementation of the new curriculum standards, both unit evaluation and academic level examination proposition principles emphasize the importance of constructing cultural knowledge and cultivating cultural awareness. The evaluation of curriculum implementation highlights the high regard for cultural education and clearly reflects the requirement for students to apply cultural knowledge. In teaching, although teachers have integrated elements of excellent traditional Chinese culture, they still overly focus on the application of English language knowledge, failing to adequately convey and practice these cultural elements. Simply adding elements of excellent traditional Chinese culture without practical application clearly contradicts the new curriculum standards. This not only diminishes the practical effectiveness and value of excellent traditional Chinese culture in teaching but also limits students' deep understanding of culture and hinders their flexible use and expression of cultural elements in language practice.

### ***3.2. Analysis of the reasons for the integration of excellent traditional Chinese culture into primary school English teaching***

#### ***3.2.1. The limitation of teachers' traditional cultural literacy***

The innovation and development of educational philosophies have spurred the updating of teaching objectives, awakening teachers' cultural awareness. The educational value of China's excellent traditional culture is increasingly recognized and valued by English teachers. Many teachers show a strong enthusiasm and willingness to integrate cultural elements into their teaching, but they often find it challenging to do so effectively, leading to unsatisfactory results. The primary reason for this is the insufficient traditional cultural literacy among teachers. Although they have some exposure to China's excellent traditional culture, their knowledge is limited, and their understanding is often superficial. This makes it difficult for them to effectively integrate cultural elements into English teaching and fully utilize these resources, resulting in inadequate integration of China's excellent traditional culture into English education.

### ***3.2.2. The restriction of language knowledge teaching concept***

Due to the long-term influence of structuralist linguistics, many primary school English teachers focus on imparting English language knowledge. <sup>[4]</sup> In language teaching, teachers tend to follow the theoretical framework of structuralism, emphasizing precise mastery of grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure, with a greater emphasis on analyzing and practicing language forms to ensure students can accurately understand and use the basic elements of the English language. Moreover, many teachers are still influenced by the concept of exam-oriented education, excessively pursuing students' English scores, focusing on the input and output of language knowledge, and rarely considering how to effectively integrate excellent traditional Chinese culture into English teaching. Teachers overly emphasize the teaching of language knowledge, neglecting the close connection between language and culture and the communicative function of language, making English a single subject focused on language knowledge. This teaching approach limits the integration of excellent traditional Chinese culture into the curriculum.

### ***3.2.3. Lack of excellent traditional Chinese culture in teaching materials***

Textbooks serve as the primary reference for both teachers and students, and the selection of their content is crucial. However, current English textbooks tend to emphasize Western culture, focusing on the cultural and daily life knowledge of English-speaking countries, with very limited coverage of China's excellent traditional culture. Moreover, the English expressions used in these texts are often inadequate. In particular, some international schools use English textbooks that are directly imported from abroad, which are heavily influenced by Western culture and values and contain almost no elements of China's excellent traditional culture. The significant lack of content related to China's excellent traditional culture in current textbooks means that teachers often lack relevant materials for teaching, or even have no content to teach, thereby increasing the difficulty of integrating China's excellent traditional culture into English teaching.

## **4. Strategies for integrating excellent traditional Chinese culture into primary school English teaching**

### ***4.1. Set teaching objectives and explore cultural materials***

Teaching activities should closely align with the teaching content and be guided by the core objectives of achieving these goals. To better integrate excellent traditional Chinese culture into English teaching,

teachers need to conduct in-depth analysis and research on the illustrations, vocabulary, sentences, and texts in the textbooks, exploring the cultural elements embedded within them. They should set clear teaching objectives based on the content, clearly define the traditional cultural elements to be integrated into each class, and assess the potential impact of these cultural elements on students' emotional cognition. However, relying solely on the excellent traditional Chinese culture content in the textbooks is insufficient; teachers must also consider the actual situation and interests of their students, collecting, screening, and integrating relevant cultural materials to enrich the classroom experience.

Taking the teaching of the fourth-grade second semester Unit 1 Time, which is published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP) and edited by Liu Zhaoyi (starting from the third grade), as an example, one of the teaching objectives of this unit is for students to master and apply the ways to express whole hours and half hours. Teachers can introduce ancient Chinese timekeeping methods, such as the twelve hours, sundials, and bell and drum timing, while teaching the basics. By integrating these ancient timekeeping methods with English time expressions, teachers can enhance language learning. These elements of excellent traditional Chinese culture not only match the cognitive level of students but also spark their interest. Integrating them into English teaching can greatly increase the fun of learning and effectively broaden students' knowledge. Only by organically combining excellent traditional Chinese culture with teaching content, teaching objectives, and students' learning conditions can teachers ensure the effective integration of culture, making it an essential part of primary school English teaching rather than a mere formality.

#### ***4.2. Teaching the comparison of Chinese and foreign cultures to enrich cultural cognition***

The primary English textbooks in China cover a wide range of aspects of Western culture, including its unique culinary traditions, etiquette norms, festivals, and sports activities. While Chinese traditional culture also contains many rich elements that correspond to these aspects, they are not fully reflected in the textbooks. Therefore, when teaching about Western culture, teachers can incorporate introductions to Chinese traditional culture, guiding students to explore cultural differences between China and the West, thereby deepening their understanding of cultural differences through comparison.

Taking the teaching of Unit 5 Food Part 5 in the third-grade second semester, edited by Liu Zhaoyi, as an example, students will learn to sing an English song about breakfast. Although most of the food vocabulary in the song pertains to Western-style breakfasts, it also includes the word 'tea,' which is closely tied to Chinese culture. Teachers can use this opportunity to guide students in comparing the differences between Chinese and Western breakfast habits, exploring the breakfast styles favored by Chinese and Western people. Through these comparisons, students can gain a deeper understanding of Chinese breakfast culture and its rich connotations, recognize the healthy concepts of Chinese dietary culture, and appreciate the wisdom embedded in it. Teaching the comparison of Chinese and foreign cultures not only enriches students' cross-cultural knowledge but also enhances their recognition of their own local culture.

#### ***4.3. Reasonable design of practical activities to deepen cultural penetration***

To help students gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the essence of China's excellent traditional culture, teachers can integrate elements of this culture into practical activities that align with the unit themes and specific teaching content. These activities include performing idiomatic stories and

historical anecdotes in English, reenacting scenes from classic films and TV shows, reciting ancient Chinese poetry, creating crafts related to traditional culture, organizing English speech contests on cultural topics, hand-drawing posters that introduce cultural elements, and sharing their observations and feelings after visiting thematic museums. Teachers should encourage students to apply what they have learned in their creative work, fostering continuous reflection, exploration, and expression.

Taking the teaching of the second semester of the fifth grade (starting from the third grade, edited by Liu Zhaoyi) as an example, this unit focuses on the theme of exploration. Teachers can introduce stories of Xu Xiake's explorations and organize students to perform these stories in a drama. Through these performances, students' cultural learning shifts from static perception to immersive experience, allowing them to more directly and profoundly feel the courage and spirit of adventure of the main characters in the stories. This also greatly enhances their interest and love for China's excellent traditional culture. Practical activities not only provide students with a platform to deeply understand and experience culture but also deepen their understanding and recognition of it through personal participation.

#### ***4.4. Adjust teaching evaluation and increase the evaluation of learning excellent traditional Chinese culture***

The evaluation mechanism plays a crucial role in education and teaching. An effective evaluation system not only ensures the direction of Chinese traditional culture education but also stimulates teachers and students' interest in this field. It boosts teachers' enthusiasm for teaching Chinese traditional culture, enhances the quality of such education, and achieves twice the results with half the effort. <sup>[5]</sup>

When evaluating students' learning of excellent traditional Chinese culture, teachers can use a combination of teacher evaluations, peer assessments, and self-assessments to provide timely and accurate feedback on their cultural performance from multiple perspectives. This approach not only offers comprehensive feedback but also enhances interaction and collaboration between teachers and students, as well as among students, thereby improving the teaching and learning outcomes of excellent traditional Chinese culture. Additionally, to deepen students' understanding of this culture, more questions related to it should be included in assessments. For example, incorporating knowledge about excellent traditional Chinese culture into multiple-choice questions and selecting articles on relevant topics for reading comprehension exercises. Including the study of excellent traditional Chinese culture in the assessment not only helps evaluate students' grasp of the culture but also increases the emphasis on cultural integration by teachers and students, ensuring that the integration of excellent traditional Chinese culture into primary school English teaching is effectively implemented.

### **5. Suggestions on integrating excellent traditional Chinese culture into primary school English teaching**

#### ***5.1. Improve the cultural quality of English teachers and enhance their sense of responsibility for spreading culture***

In the context of globalization, English teachers not only handle routine language teaching but also play a crucial role in promoting cultural exchange and dissemination. The cultural literacy of English teachers is vital for cultural communication and significantly influences the effectiveness of cultural education. Teachers with a solid foundation in language, keen cross-cultural insight, and a deep cultural

background can accurately and vividly convey the essence of culture in their English classes. Educational training departments should introduce Chinese excellent traditional culture courses in both Chinese and English, and organize various cultural experience activities to enrich English teachers' knowledge of Chinese excellent traditional culture, enhance their cultural literacy, and strengthen their sense of responsibility in cultural dissemination. This will enable them to shoulder the historical mission of spreading Chinese excellent traditional culture in English teaching and contribute to the inheritance and development of culture.

## ***5.2.Developing school-based teaching materials on excellent traditional Chinese culture***

To optimize teaching resources and promote the inheritance and promotion of excellent traditional Chinese culture, schools can develop school-based textbooks that integrate students' learning conditions and educational philosophies. The content should emphasize cultural diversity and inclusiveness. While incorporating elements such as literature, art, history, music, dance, traditional Chinese medicine, and traditional crafts, the textbooks should also reflect local culture to create culturally distinctive materials. To ensure the scientific accuracy and rigor of the textbooks, the development process should involve language scholars, cultural experts, and experienced textbook writers. The development of these school-based textbooks not only enhances the school curriculum structure and enriches the teaching content of excellent traditional Chinese culture but also supports the inheritance and development of local culture.

## **Conclusions**

In summary, integrating the excellent traditional Chinese culture into primary school English teaching has significant educational value. English teachers should fully recognize the importance of incorporating traditional culture into their lessons and adopt effective teaching strategies to integrate cultural elements into their instruction. The effective integration of culture not only enriches English teaching but also helps students strengthen their national and cultural confidence and deepen their patriotic sentiments. It enhances students' cross-cultural communication skills, enabling them to tell China's stories in English and spread China's voice to the world, further promoting the inheritance and promotion of excellent traditional Chinese culture.

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