

# Cultivating College Students' National Culture Identity Based on English Education

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## Abstract

Our country is a multi-ethnic country with plentiful national culture achievements, and the development of the national culture shows a trend of diversity, so cultural identity construction is particularly important. Article analyzes the concept of national identity, the relation between cultural identity and ethnic identity, the present situation of national cultural identity in the English education in our country, and the English education and national culture identity education in surrounding neighbor countries, then proposes some suggestions of implementing national cultural identity education based on English Education.

**Keyword:** college English, education, national culture, identity, cultivate

## 1. Introduction

The Chinese nation has a long history of 5,000 years with plentiful national cultural accumulations. With the formation and development of the globalization, international cultural exchanges become more and more important, showing a trend of cultural diversity. As for our country--a multi-ethnic country with 56 ethnic groups, the rest are minorities besides Han nationality.

Although all ethnic groups share the same cultural origin which belongs to the descendants of the Chinese nation, the cultural differentiation among the ethnic groups is ever-lasting and increasing, due to the different historical development levels and the regional divergences of minorities. In this situation, it is urgent and important to attach great importance to the national identity education. Thus, we will strengthen the national cohesion and build a harmonious country, There is an urgent need to research and study the importance and essence of national identification and thus find solutions to the problems which cultural diversity pose for stability and for harmony of this nation.

## 2. National Identity

As a social-being, everyone should be aware of their social identity, that is, to clarify one's identity in respect of country, ethnicity and culture. When people clarify their true inner essence, they will come to a sense of knowingness of who they really are. In this way, they can obtain the sense of belonging in terms of culture and nationality, as well as the sense of self-recognition and acceptance from their country and society. Thereby the national identity is formed gradually. The whole identity among ethnic groups is a fundamental expression of national identity. Ultimately the unified national identity is coming into being. As for national identity, Professor Wang believes that it is a sense of belonging to an ethnic group, owing to the personal experience and individual behavior. It is a process of identity construction. "Individuals living in minority areas can get a real sense of belonging or a feeling of "being at home" through construction of individual recognition of national culture." (Wang, 1991).

National identity is a cognition in which people believe that they belong to the same ethnic group, it is a special cognition including attitudes and affections between each other in this group. It is central to the psychological functioning of members of ethnic groups, Chen Lihua believe that national identity is a sense of belonging to a ethnic group, (including perception, thinking, behavior and emotion related with this ethnic group). According to Taifel from Britain, national identity comes from personal recognition relevant to ethnic group, including the value and emotions attached to this identity, A German scholar Bernhard Giesen believes that national identity is mainly composed of three parts: the understanding of a specific life ; Historical process of ethnic interaction; and

lansign. And they interact with each other: the lansign, as the carrier of the other two former factors, is bound to express human's feelings and understanding.

A nation is a community built on the basis of the same language, history and culture. It develops step by step based on specific language or symbols. It is a one-sided understanding to consider a nation as a territory or a race. National identity is the core of nation-building spirit and psychology, which is the general attitude towards the nation (including production, life, etc.). Individuals of a nation will gain a sense of belonging and national identity by means of language and culture.

### **3. Close Relationship between Cultural Identity and National Identity**

In regards to cultural identity, it is generally recognized that it is a socio- psychological process in which an individual gains, maintains, and brings about a new culture through internalizing the existing culture and the cultural group to which he belongs, and in which his sense of belonging is shaped. All linked with one another, it is a sense of identity including language culture, religious culture, food culture and customs.

Cultural identity is not only related to ethnic groups, but also closely related to the political world, especially to the current "global integration" cosmopolitanism. Cultural identity is indispensable to build ethnic identity, and it is also a critical link to upgrade the latter to a higher level-national identity

On one hand, cultural identity serves ethnic identity and national identity; on the other hand, it belongs to or it is even superior to ethnic identity and national identity. There exist the differences and connections among the three notions.

Further more, cultural identity is an individual's sense of belonging to a specific culture, which can be expressed in one's psychology or in one's behavior. As a social-being, if one is subordinate to a particular culture, he is supposed to be excluded by other cultures. The formation of cultural identity is, to some extent, a process in which an individual's sense of belongings comes into being. In this process, with the formation of his cultural sense of belongings, he is separated from other cultures. For example, Han Fu as a symbol of widespread concern about the culture, its essence is that people seek cultural sense of belonging through clothing. Therefore, the formation of one's cultural identity is a process to identify one's own culture and also a process to separate out other cultures.

Our country is a multi-ethnic country with abundant historical culture accumulation, showing a trend of cultural diversity. Cultural identity is particularly important. National culture identity is not supposed to be confined to the identification of one's own country, it should be extended to the recognition of other countries and that of other cultures. It is a continuous process of promoting one's national culture. Actually, the historical development of the countries, differences in the geographical environment, life style changes, as well as the different national characters determine the difference among cultures.

National culture is the key to maintain the multiplying and development of a nation. More precisely speaking, it is the spiritual power for national development. On the other hand, the national development level and national characteristics are reflected in the national culture. National culture identity is, in some respects, also a recognition of that nation. At least, it is an approbation of the major national cultural accumulation. Thereby, national cultural identity makes a positive effect on the formation of national identity and the reinforcement of national cohesion.

### **4. Status Quo of National Culture Identity Education in English Education**

Global integration has facilitated the cultural globalization world-widely. And it has also promoted the international cultural exchanges. The form and development of a Civilization have been realized in the course of collision and blend. The cultural development which shows a trend of diversity is indeed a combination of conflict and fusion.

However, the status quo of cultural identity education in China is not in an optimistic condition. "Nowadays, some developed countries in the western world use their economic advantages to strengthen the cultural hegemony, in order to replace their traditional culture." (Chen, 2008). The study of combination of cultural identity education and English education seems particularly weak. It is particularly important and necessary to integrate national culture identity education into college English education. "In the field of contemporary "traditional culture studies", the issues of preventing potential "cultural hegemony" and protecting the security of indigenous cultures are difficult but unavoidable problems (Deng, 2012).

As an important component of education, English education mainly deals with the issues related to culture, notably western culture. It is helpful to foster students' national feelings and to enhance students' humane

accomplishment by implementing cultural identity education and by making full use of this “cultural and educational fertile breeding ground”. Education is always the national culture life hope department. To some extent, English education and cultural identity education can be merged. This fusion enables the college students to have a more profound understanding about traditional culture, promotes the exchanges between Chinese culture and Western culture, and improves the students’ cross-cultural communication skills. In a word, it is conducive to the social development.

The cultural pattern in the current world is composed of five cultural circles such as China, Euro-America, Arab, India, and Russia-East Europe. As an important part of the world culture, Chinese culture is the cultural lifeline and product formed in the history of China. It is the historical and cultural background to build a harmoniously socialist society. Chinese culture is also a bond between the spiritual pursuit of its descendants and the prosperity of this nation. However, the western culture crushes into China, which has changed the life -style, values, spirits and cultural connotations of the younger generation. Thus, our traditional culture is marginalized. In other words, in our efforts to achieve the modernization process, we have consciously or unconsciously played down the traditional culture. On the contrary, we blindly worship, accept, and experience the western culture without rejecting the bad, and thus our “cultural consciousness” is gradually lost. Finally, we become the potential object of “western cultural penetration”. Student is the future of our nation. Their national culture identity education is closely bound up with their recognition of national culture.

However, the status quo and the effect of the national culture identity education in English education in China is not in an optimistic condition. English as a major subject, receives more and more attentions from the society and school in these years. But traditional teaching objectives and methods are only helpful to cope with all kinds of English tests in the middle school and university. Chinese traditional culture is rarely mentioned, let alone the deeper understanding of Chinese culture. Therefore, The main reason is that they do not see the need to learn Chinese culture. There is a lack of motivation to do so.

On the other hand, with the development of English education, students’ English level has been improved, which enables them to broaden their horizon, to learn more about western culture and to integrate themselves into western culture. But at the same time the Culture Alienation is gradually engendered. The defamiliarization eventually is leading to a loss of traditional culture. So “Chinese cultural aphasia” do happen frequently in intercultural communication, which obstruct effective communication. The redefinition of cultural identity and the timely arousal of native consciousness become the key to the guardianship of Chinese culture.

Of course, not all the English learners have a sense of cultural loss in this process of learning. A lot of English learners have gained two cultural identities in English learning. In this case, western culture poses no threat to traditional culture, and learners can transform freely between two cultures on the basis of actual condition. However, the traditional culture has not taken a superior place.

### **5. English Education and National Cultural Identity Education in Neighboring Countries**

In Japan, the English education objective is very clear, that is, it is playing an important role in promoting the development of Japan as a tool which absorbs the advanced western culture in the process of international cultural exchanges.

English is an important skill which leads people to a higher level. Japan attaches great importance to the education of social science, to the promotion of English education (as a way to obtain information and identification), and this country is paying particular attention to the Japanese education (the key of recognition) in order to foster and cultivate their national identity.

Singapore has formulated a bilingual teaching policy which is mainly based on English (bilingual/trilingual teaching method) based on its national conditions (multi-ethnic, multilingual country). “Singapore emphasizes that English promotes an extensive exchange of its culture with other countries. And finally the integration of the world economy will come into being” (Chen, 2008). In this way, on one hand, the students know well about their mother language culture (traditional Culture); on the other hand, they master English (Western Culture). The aim is to enhance the students' sense of identity of their own national culture.

English instruction has been criticized, and many blame Korean students’ lack of English proficiency for this, even after they have studied English for years. However, with Korea’s globalization campaign in the early 1990s, the Korean Ministry of Education has stated that the major purpose of English Education is to help students develop the English language skills to enable them to communicative effectively with foreigners. Accordingly, knowing English in Korea is a major concern in all areas of government, business, and education, and students

have to master the complex English language and the communication skills required by the emerging Korean global economy and society.

## **6. Suggestions on the Integration of National Cultural Identity Education in English Education of China**

China's current educational system is still exam-oriented, which is a kind of educational phenomena derived from college entrance examination in the times of social transformation. Influenced by this educational system, English education overemphasizes the English study but neglects the traditional culture education, which is leading to an inadequate understanding of national tradition and national culture. The problem of "lack of traditional culture" is becoming serious. The students' recognition of Chinese traditional culture is insufficient, which seriously affects the formation and development of national identity. English education is the language and cultural education, the teaching process (to show the identity of culture) is also the construction of cultural identity. "The economic reform and economic development have greatly influenced the ethnic minority areas, thus, more and more people realize that the bilingual teaching model plays a important role in improving the educational quality" (Gao, 2011).

## **7. Orientation of the Teachers' Career Development and the Educational Concept of National Cultural Identity**

### *7.1 Establishment of the Educational Concept of National Cultural Identity*

According to Sapir Edward, an American linguists, culture is what we are doing and thinking for society, Language is a specific way to express one's thought. Language teaching is closely related to culture. Contemporary English education requires English teachers to improve their English level and to enrich their cultural background knowledge. Meanwhile, "the teachers are undertaking the mission to spread the oriental and occidental culture. Especially in the process of English education, western culture will probably unconsciously infiltrate into Chinese culture." (Gao, 2011). This phenomenon will bring about the neglecting of traditional culture. Language and culture are closely interrelated, so it's important to penetrate culture in the course of English teaching. In this situation, English teachers should reconsider how to prevent the infiltration of western culture and how to encourage students to learn traditional culture. On the other hand, the over-resistance against foreign cultural invasion should not be encouraged. To sum up, English teachers should set up a multicultural education concept with which different ethnic cultures are treated equally, exchanges between cultures are encouraged, mutual understanding and respect are promoted.

Teacher's mode of thinking has a big influence on students. In the process of English education, objective elaboration on culture will guide students to analyze problems from multicultural perspective and to strengthen students' cultural identity. Schools should carry out school-based training for the foreign language teachers on the basis of the actual situation. This training is supposed to be a traditional culture-centered program. The aim is to strengthen their understanding of national culture and to establish their national culture identity

### *7.2 Comparative Study of Chinese and Western Culture and Good Cultural Experience Activities*

Most of cultural content in English education is related to western cultural background. Meanwhile, it should also refers to Chinese traditional culture. In English teaching, teachers should not only pay attention to language training, but also should increase exposure to authentic materials; integrate cultural teaching with language teaching; encourage in order to edify student with culture imperceptibly and emphasize and highlight the superiority of the traditional Chinese culture.

Teachers should be good at unearthing knowledge points in textbooks and enriching their knowledge. The comparative analysis of the similarities between the eastern and Western cultures is very important to help students to understand the difference. Meanwhile, the cultural experience activities should be encouraged. In this way, students can strongly feel the cultural difference, broaden their horizons, weakened or eliminate the contradictions and conflicts caused by cultural differences and correct their misunderstanding about the culture of other nations. Finally, the cultural exchange will be promoted. Actually, the teaching methods are diversified.

For example, the classic English songs / poetry appreciation (digging cultural connotation), classical Chinese and Western drama fragment performances (the feeling of the differences between Chinese and western culture.), European and American movie appreciation (Perceptive of western culture.) and western festivals activities. Students will deepen cognition and understanding of Chinese and Western culture.

### *7.3 Reform of Textbook and "Local Culture" Introduction*

In terms of English textbook selection, "national cultural identity" should be taken into consideration. There are many kinds of College English textbooks, whether professional or non professional, few textbooks regard

Chinese traditional culture or the comparison between western culture and Chinese culture as their main content. Since national identity education plays an important rule in foreign language education, more attention must be paid to the Chinese traditional culture education, especially the traditional ethnic culture education. Based on this, we suggest an approach to the problem: enriching teaching contents and using flexible teaching methods in accordance with the following: adding new types of exercises, adding new contents, adding the contents of culture textbooks, and designing program for degrees of students (for the lower level student we use the textbooks with Chinese/ English bilingual version to help learners understand Chinese and Western cultural phenomenon; for senior level students, we use the English version).

In each section, regarding to the listening and speaking reading and writing parts, we should attach more importance to the cultural relevance and systemic knowledge, so that students can easily understand and master the content. Of course, the school also can support the students politically and financially according to the students ethnic identity. It is indispensable to encourage foreign language teachers building a teaching and researching team. The involvement of English teachers would facilitate the writing of school-based teaching materials.

## 8. Conclusion

College English education brings us the advanced western culture in the process of English teaching, which promotes the development of a country in a certain extent. Educational administrative organizations and public have considered English education as a way of skill training. In fact, this teaching method remains reluctant to take into account the social values and ideologies, which, in fact, exert great influence on education. Thus, western culture will pass through the political and social barrier and it will finally infiltrate in our national culture. This cultural invasion has a great influence on our national culture cognition and identity. Therefore, the implementation of the national cultural identity education is particularly important in English education in China.

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