

A Study on Practical Pathways of College English Teaching from the Perspective of “Telling China’s Story Well”

Guo Peng

College of Humanities, Liaoning Communication University, Shenyang, 110136, China

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Abstract: “Telling China’s Story Well” aligns with the needs of college English curriculum reform and meets the requirements for enhancing the soft power of Chinese culture and innovating cultural communication methods. This paper analyzes the current situation and challenges of “Telling China’s Story Well” in college English classrooms, elaborates on the practical significance of integrating excellent Chinese culture into English teaching, and proposes practical pathways for “Telling China’s Story Well.” It aims to eliminate the blind spots in Chinese university students’ English communication of Chinese culture, update teaching approaches for college English curriculum development, and enhance the educational effectiveness of ideological and political elements in English courses.

1. Introduction

In August 2018, General Secretary Xi Jinping delivered a significant speech at The National Conference on Publicity and Ideological Work, where he emphasized, “To present a true, multidimensional, and comprehensive view of China, we must enhance our international communication capabilities, tell China’s story well, disseminate China’s voice well, and thereby boost the country’s cultural soft power and the influence of Chinese culture.” As a global lingua franca, English serves as a crucial window for promoting the excellent traditional Chinese culture and a powerful bridge connecting world cultures with Chinese civilization. University students, acting as intermediaries in cross-cultural exchanges, should possess strong foreign language proficiency, demonstrate a profound understanding of traditional culture, and skillfully utilize various digital platforms to narrate China’s story, spreading Chinese civilization and the Chinese spirit to the international community. College English education, with its rich content, extensive faculty, and broad audience, serves as a primary channel for “Telling China’s Story Well” and promoting the Chinese spirit. This study focuses on cultivating university students’ diversified communicative competence in the new era, examining the current state of integrating China’s story into college English classrooms. It highlights the practical significance of incorporating China’s story into English teaching and proposes strategies for effective pedagogical implementation. Besides, College English Teaching Guide (2020 Edition) reinforces the positioning of college English teaching within the framework of liberal arts education and the development of multifaceted communicative competence. It explicitly states that, in addition to traditional teaching content, students should expand the breadth and depth of internalized knowledge acquisition, enhance their understanding of global diversity, increase sensitivity to cultural differences between China and the West, and improve their intercultural communication skills. Therefore, integrating Chinese stories into college English classrooms aligns with China’s requirements for cultivating a new generation of university students and meets the teaching objectives of college English courses. Moreover, it reflects the theoretical relationship between language and culture—that they are inseparable and mutually reinforcing.[1]

2. Pathways of college English teaching from the perspective of “Telling China’s Story Well”

2.1 Adhering to Production-oriented Approach to achieve the integration of learning and using

The core of “Telling China’s Story Well” lies in what to tell and how to tell it. What to tell involves understanding and interpretation of Chinese culture, which requires students to have a certain reserve of cultural knowledge. How to tell it involves intercultural communication skills and English communication abilities, which require students to be able to accurately and appropriately express themselves in English based on their understanding of Chinese culture. The theoretical connotations of Production-Oriented Approach (POA) highly coincide with the goal of “Telling China’s Story Well.” The learning-centered theory emphasizes student-centered learning, which is consistent with the focus of “Telling China’s Story Well” on cultivating students’ cultural understanding and expressive abilities. The theory of integrating learning and using stresses the combination of language learning and language use, which aligns with the requirement of “Telling China’s Story Well” for students to use English to tell China’s story in real communication. The holistic education theory emphasizes the cultivation of students’ comprehensive quality, which matches the goal of “Telling China’s Story Well” to enhance students’ cultural confidence and intercultural communication abilities.[2] Therefore, college English teachers should employ the Production-oriented Approach (POA) to integrate “Telling China’s Story Well” into the college English curriculum, thereby improving students’ English language abilities, enhancing their cultural confidence, and boosting their capabilities in disseminating Chinese culture.

The General Secretary, Xi Jinping pointed out that “Telling China’s Stories Well” means “telling the stories of the Chinese Communist Party, the stories of China, and the stories of Chinese people.” Only in this way can we better present a true, multidimensional, and comprehensive image of China. From an individual perspective, students, as practitioners of “Telling China’s story well”, not only learn foundational English skills but also gain a deep understanding of China’s stories and learn to narrate them in English. In international exchanges, they can adopt a perspective of staying rooted in Chinese culture while embracing global perspectives, thereby achieving effective communication. From a national standpoint, “Telling China’s story well” effectively cultivates students’ national pride and broadens their global vision. By using English to introduce China’s traditional culture and contemporary achievements in politics, economy, technology, and other fields, it helps shape a positive international image of China and enhances global understanding of the country. [3]

In other words, college English teaching carries the important mission of conveying China’s voice and promoting the international dissemination of Chinese culture. Therefore, in the process of college English instruction, teachers, guided by POA framework, should help students deepen their understanding of learning objectives and tasks. This enables them to flexibly master various learning methods, comprehend materials efficiently, and achieve the desired learning outcomes—ultimately realizing the integration of “learning” and “using”.

2.2 Using China’s story as the teaching content to continuously improve the course teaching design

College English courses often have a strong dependency on textbooks in terms of teaching content. Therefore, teachers should make full use of the texts related to China’s story in college English textbooks. By leveraging the advantages of teaching design, they can integrate “Telling China’s Story Well” with college English teaching. English teachers should reasonably design various teaching activities and tasks to systematically achieve the goals of language teaching and ability cultivation.

We can take the reading task Chinese Admiral in the India Ocean from Unit 7 Cultures across borders of the textbook New Generation College English (Advanced Level Book 2) as a case study, and conduct research and analysis on the teaching design of college English courses. The text narrates that Chinese navigator and explorer Zheng He (1371-1433) led the world’s largest fleet on seven voyages to the West 620 years ago, leaving an indelible mark on the history of human navigation. These voyages, a series of large-scale maritime expeditions in the early Ming Dynasty, hold profound historical significance and extensive influence. Comprising 12 paragraphs, the text is structured as follows: The first two paragraphs provide an overview of Zheng He’s life. Paragraphs

three to five delve into the historical context and enabling conditions of his voyages. The final seven paragraphs (six to twelve) meticulously outline the navigation process, achievements, and historical significance of Zheng He's seven voyages.

2.2.1 Motivating students' interest in learning English

During the motivating phase of teaching, the primary responsibilities of the teacher are to present communicative contexts and to stimulate students' motivation to learn. Initially, students' interest in learning is ignited by watching the video in the "Viewing" module of the textbook and completing the corresponding exercises. This process activates their prior knowledge and prepares them for the subsequent text study and discussion. The video depicts Zheng He's voyage to Southeast Asia and Java island in Indonesia, thereby arousing students' curiosity and thirst for knowledge about Zheng He's seven long-distance voyages. Teachers can take advantage of this teaching module by creating communicative contexts that encourage students to think about and attempt to answer the following questions: 1. How did Zheng He's background and experiences influence his maritime career? 2. In what ways was Zheng He's leadership ability manifested? 3. What were the backgrounds of Zheng He's seven naval expeditions? 4. What were the main objectives of Zheng He's seven naval expeditions? 5. What was the level of maritime technology during Zheng He's seven naval expeditions? 6. What were the historical significance and impact of Zheng He's seven naval expeditions? By forming study groups, students can showcase their learning outcomes and narrate the Chinese story of Zheng He's seven naval expeditions. Through observation, teachers should identify, point out, and summarize the communicative issues encountered by students during this phase, thereby laying the foundation for the subsequent enabling phase of instruction.

2.2.2 Enabling students to master English communication skills

To enable students to effectively "Tell China's Story Well" in English during the enabling phase, teachers need to focus on and guide students' language learning, helping them distill ideas and viewpoints, and enhance their oral and written English communication skills.

On the level of idea, by assigning text-learning tasks, students are required to summarize the main ideas and ideological connotations of each section by analyzing the discourse structure of the text. Additionally, in conjunction with the six questions proposed during the motivating phase, students can be encouraged to go beyond the corresponding answers within the text. For example, the sixth paragraph of the text provides a detailed description of the scale of Zheng He's fleet: during the first naval expedition, there were over 60 ships, with the largest treasure ship measuring approximately 148 meters in length and 60 meters in width, capable of accommodating thousands of people. The fleet included a diverse range of personnel, such as sailors, soldiers, diplomats, merchants, craftsmen, and doctors. The ninth paragraph summarizes the economic and cultural achievements of Zheng He's voyages: the opening of new trade routes facilitated trade between China and various countries in Asia and Africa. Chinese goods like silk, porcelain, and tea were highly popular overseas, while spices, jewels, and medicinal herbs from abroad were also imported into China in large quantities. This trade not only enriched the variety of goods but also spurred the economic development of the Ming Dynasty. The twelfth paragraph elaborates on the historical significance of Zheng He's voyages: for China, these voyages showcased the formidable national strength of the Ming Dynasty and enhanced national pride. They also accumulated valuable experience for the development of China's maritime industry and propelled advancements in navigation technology. Meanwhile, the maritime activities promoted economic and cultural exchanges between China and other countries, broadening Chinese people's horizons and deepening their understanding of the world. For the world, Zheng He's voyages were a remarkable feat in the history of global navigation. Zheng He's voyages also strengthened the connections between Asian and African countries, fostering regional economic and cultural exchanges and making significant contributions to the integration of world civilizations. Through well-designed teaching activities, students can gain a deep understanding of the ideological connotations of the text.

On language learning, the instructional design should assist students in summarizing and recounting key vocabulary, phrases, and sentence patterns related to Zheng He's voyages. For

instance, it should cover essential nautical nouns such as “voyage, shipbuilding, navigation, exploration, fleet, flagship, trip, expedition, pirates”; nouns that reflect the economic and cultural achievements of the voyages like “porcelain, tea, fragrance, zebra, camel, ostrich, ivory” and phraseological expressions that capture the historical significance, such as “establish peaceful ties with sb.” and “demonstrate Chinese excellence at sth.”[4] The text employs the method of comparison in two instances to illustrate the grand scale and early timing of Zheng He’s voyages. In 6th paragraph, the author contrasts the fleet sizes of Zheng He and Christopher Columbus. Zheng He’s fleet was enormous, with 240 ships and over 20,000 personnel on its maiden voyage. His treasure ships were the largest sailing vessels in the world at that time, featuring watertight compartments and mortise-and-tenon construction techniques. In contrast, Columbus’s fleet consisted of only three small ships: Santa Maria, Pinta, and Niña with 87 crew members. In 12th paragraph, the author compares the timelines of Zheng He’s and Ferdinand Magellan’s voyages, highlighting a century-long gap. This comparison underscores the advanced level of ancient Chinese maritime technology.

2.2.3 Focusing on output production and promoting learning through assessing

In output phase, teachers should assign different tasks based on the language proficiency and learning conditions of each class. For example, for liberal arts or STEM students with a strong English foundation, teachers may assign challenging output tasks such as traditional English writing or translation exercises. For art students with average English skills, teachers can design innovative output tasks like oral presentations or video dubbing.

Regarding teaching evaluation, teachers should adopt a combination of immediate and delayed assessments. Immediate evaluation refers to feedback provided by the teacher during students’ selective learning and output task practice. This real-time assessment helps teachers adjust the teaching pace and monitor progress effectively.[5] In the classroom, teachers achieve this by commenting on students’ answers, summarizing responses, and evaluating task completion. Delayed evaluation involves students submitting their practice results for teacher assessment after extracurricular exercises. For instance, imitating the textbook content, the teacher may assign a writing task—writing a letter to a foreign friend introducing a famous figure in Chinese history and culture. Students submit their work via the iWrite platform, enabling peer review where each student reads and evaluates a classmate’s writing with comments and scores. Teachers can then select exemplary works for feedback, evaluating the output from multiple dimensions, including task completion, structure design, content design, cohesion and coherence, lexical resources, and grammatical accuracy. The subjects chosen by students for their writing are diverse, ranging from philosophers of the Spring and Autumn period to literary figures of various dynasties, from accomplished emperors and generals to skilled artisans and scientists across different fields. Each essay reflects the unity of content and ideology in “Telling China’s Story Well.”

2.3 Innovating teaching methods actively and organizing curriculum implementation reasonably

In teaching textual passages, the most common approach is for teachers to focus on word-for-word translation of the text, supplemented by occasional questions. This teacher-centered, lecture-dominated “one-way” teaching method no longer meets the demands of foreign language education in the new era. Not only is this method dull and monotonous, but it also dampens students’ enthusiasm for participation. With the continuous advancement of modern teaching facilities and pedagogical concepts, diversified college English teaching models have emerged, such as problem-based learning, case-based teaching, role-playing methods, and task-driven instruction. These methods highlight the central role of students in classroom teaching while emphasizing the guiding function of college English teachers, helping them organize curriculum implementation effectively from the perspective of “Telling China’s Story Well.”

As pointed out in College English Teaching Guide (2020 Edition), College English classroom teaching can adopt task-based, cooperative, project-based, and inquiry-based methods, reflecting the teaching philosophy of “teachers as the guide and students as the center.” This shifts teaching activities from “teaching” to “learning” and redirects the teaching process from focusing on “teaching

objectives” to addressing “learning needs”, establishing a teaching norm characterized by teacher guidance and inspiration alongside active student participation. The application of teaching methods should emphasize cultivating students’ autonomous learning abilities, guiding and helping them master learning strategies and learn how to learn. Teachers should make full use of online teaching platforms to provide students with self-directed learning paths that integrate classroom teaching and modern information technology, along with abundant autonomous learning resources, encouraging a shift from “passive learning” to “active learning.”[6] The improvement of teaching methods should also incorporate the latest research findings in applied linguistics, both domestically and internationally, continuously updating concepts and adopting approaches that align with the characteristics of the new generation of college students.

For example, before teaching the text *Chinese Admiral in the Indian Ocean*, teachers can assign the content as learning tasks to students and extract key questions from the text for them to ponder and answer during independent study. Teachers may also have students role-play Zheng He, narrating his seven voyages from a first-person perspective. Group works can be recorded as videos for class presentations, or students can be invited to perform Zheng He’s voyages live in class. Innovating traditional foreign language teaching methods can stimulate students’ interest in learning, achieve teaching objectives through engaging activities, and complete teaching tasks, thereby optimizing and innovating college English classroom instruction.

2.4 Fully utilizing modern teaching technologies to optimize college English instructional methods

The application of modern information technology in college English teaching has not only modernized, diversified, and streamlined teaching methods but also transformed teaching philosophies, content, and approaches. The information age has provided foreign language education with entirely new learning methods and an unprecedented wealth of resources. Therefore, college English instruction should vigorously promote the integration of the latest information technology into curriculum teaching, continuing to leverage the significant role of modern educational technology—particularly information technology—in foreign language education.

College English teachers must keep pace with the times, stay abreast of technological advancements, and continuously enhance their awareness, knowledge, and skills in using information technology. They should incorporate and appropriately utilize technological elements in the design and implementation of classroom teaching. Universities should fully leverage information technology to actively create diverse teaching and learning environments. Teachers should be encouraged to develop and utilize micro-lectures and MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), harness high-quality online educational resources to enrich and expand teaching content, and implement blended teaching models such as flipped classrooms that combine in-person and online courses. These approaches will guide students toward active, autonomous, and personalized learning.

By establishing interactive online learning platforms, a comprehensive teaching system can be provided for both teachers and students, covering instructional design, classroom interaction, teacher guidance, student practice, assignment feedback, and learning assessment. The teaching system should feature human-computer and interpersonal interaction capabilities, emphasizing ease of use, mobility, and monitorability. It should allow students to select learning materials suited to their proficiency levels and needs anytime, anywhere, while also tracking and monitoring their progress and providing timely feedback.

To advance the modernization of English teaching methods in universities, improving the effectiveness of teaching and learning should be prioritized. While utilizing modern teaching tools in a scientific and rational manner, instructors must also balance the relationship between traditional and modern teaching methods. They should pay attention to the necessary interpersonal interactions and emotional exchanges between teachers and students, providing students with inspiration and influence in areas such as thought, emotion, character, and aesthetics.

3. Conclusion

“Telling China’s Story Well” in English and improving college students’ multicultural communication abilities are not only intrinsic requirements of college English teaching objectives but also serve as a window for disseminating Chinese culture and values. As a widely offered compulsory general education course in Chinese higher education, college English should actively adapt to the needs of contemporary students in foreign language learning. College English teachers should fully leverage big data platforms, proactively reform teaching methodologies and models, and update teaching content to meet the demands of the times. They must also take the initiative in strengthening faculty team development, innovating new modes of teacher-student interaction in the information age, and creating practical teaching materials and corpora tailored for spreading China’s stories and spirit. These efforts will enhance students’ multicultural learning competence and English proficiency, enabling them to serve as effective messengers in bringing Chinese culture to the world.

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