

# Cultivation Pathways for Intercultural Communicative Competence in Tertiary-level English Education from the Perspective of Cultural Confidence

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**Abstract:** Under the comprehensive implementation of the cultural confidence strategy, tertiary-level English teaching remains no longer confined to the single role of “linguistic tool”. Instead, it has become an important bridge between linguistic learning and cultural dissemination in the cultivation of cross-cultural communication skills. However, current intercultural teaching process of tertiary-level English suffers from challenges such as overemphasis on Western culture over integration of native culture, outdated and monotonous teaching methods, and insufficient application of authentic contexts, resulting in students failing to demonstrate their cultural confidence and conduct effective communication in the “Chinese-Western dialogue”. Based on current teaching status of higher education, this study integrates with the basic requirements of cultural confidence, optimizes teaching content while innovating teaching methods, builds practice platforms on this basis of enhancing faculty competencies, and seeks for actionable concrete strategies from the four dimensions, aiming to empower students to maintain cultural subjectivity in cross-cultural exchanges, enhancing intercultural agency and pragmatic efficacy, while fostering symbiotic growth of linguistic proficiency and humanistic literacy.

**Keywords:** Cultural Confidence, Tertiary-level English, Intercultural Communicative Competence, Cultivation Pathway

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## 1. Introduction

Cultural confidence constitutes the spiritual impetus for making a country stronger, and equally the cornerstone and prerequisite for cross-cultural communication. Tertiary-level English serves as an important tool for cross-cultural exchanges, bearing the important mission of enabling students to understand different cultures and introducing excellent Chinese culture to the world while cultivating students’ language application capabilities. However, current teaching of cross-cultural communication in tertiary-level English in China still faces many problems. Some teachers place too much emphasis on imparting Western culture while neglecting the study and integration of traditional Chinese culture, resulting in that students exhibit Occidental cultural subservience during cross-cultural exchanges – a cognitive asymmetry perpetuated by epistemic hegemony, manifesting as systematic undervaluation of Chinese civilizational paradigms. They cannot well understand Western culture and express excellent Chinese culture in English, lacking true intercultural communicative competence. Therefore, it is a critical exigency in higher education to study how to cultivate intercultural communicative competence from the perspective of cultural confidence to transcend conventional didactics and engineer life-proximate curricula with precision-tailored relevance.

## 2. Core Connotations and Practical Significance of Cultivating Intercultural Communicative Competence in Tertiary-level English Education from the Perspective of Cultural Confidence

### 2.1 Core Connotations

From the perspective of cultural confidence, intercultural communicative competence in tertiary-level English

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education transcends mere “linguistic translation + cultural awareness”. It is a dual-capacity capability rooted in cultural confidence, encompassing both the comprehension of diverse cultures and the effective communication of one’s own cultural identity <sup>[1]</sup>. It mainly consists of three aspects. The first is the fundamental linguistic proficiency, namely proficient mastery of listening, speaking, reading and writing, which is the cornerstone for conducting cross-cultural communication. The second is cultural metacognition capacity, enabling to objectively and rationally view the differences and similarities between Chinese and Western cultures, accept various cultures, and abandon cultural biases. The third is cultural dissemination and expression capabilities, requiring upholding the value orientation of excellent traditional Chinese culture during cross-cultural exchanges and accurately expounding the essence of Chinese culture in English, in order to achieve equal exchanges and good communication between Chinese and foreign cultures. These three elements are interdependent and mutually reinforcing, constituting the holistic architecture for intercultural communicative competence in the context of cultural confidence.

## **2.2 Practical Significance**

From the perspective of students’ personal development, cultivating intercultural communicative competence can facilitate students to overcome the barriers in cross-cultural exchanges, and improve language application efficacy to solidify the foundations for future learning and work. Concurrently, it facilitates the cultivation of sound cultural perspectives, while strengthening national cultural confidence and pride. From the perspective of university education and teaching, emphasizing the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence is conducive to promoting tertiary-level English teaching reform, overcoming the traditional practices of “overemphasis grammar over culture” and “overemphasis Western culture over native culture” to integrate linguistic learning with culture education, thereby improving the quality and depth of English teaching <sup>[2]</sup>. From the perspective of cultural dissemination, university students are the fresh troops in disseminating Chinese culture. Their intercultural communicative competence enhancement is conducive to promoting excellent Chinese culture to the world, augmenting communication and exchanges between Chinese and foreign cultures, and implementing the strategic deployment of cultural confidence.

## **3. Current Challenges in the Cultivation of Intercultural Communicative Competence in Tertiary-level English Education from the Perspective of Cultural Confidence**

### **3.1 Instructional Content Imbalance with Systemic Deficiency in Native Cultural Integration**

Currently, tertiary-level English textbooks demonstrate notably insufficient coverage of outstanding traditional Chinese culture, with minimal inclusion at best. Where referenced, the content remains fragmentary and superficial, lacking both systemic breadth and analytical depth. In classrooms, teachers predominantly expounds on the background knowledge of Western culture to enable students to understand the significance of Western culture while neglecting the excavation and impartation of native culture, resulting in students’ insufficient proficiency in expressing excellent Chinese culture in English—their inability to accurately convey traditional Chinese culture and moral values during international exchanges, leading to “cultural aphasia” and deviating from the educational goal of cultivating cultural confidence.

### **3.2 Fossilized Teaching Models Lacking Practical Dimensions**

Currently, most intercultural teaching for tertiary-level English still follows the traditional approach of “classroom lecturing + textbook reading”, which is teacher-centered, resulting in students lacking opportunities for exchanges and practice. In classroom instruction, teachers predominantly focus on delivering cultural knowledge and analyzing cultural differences, while rarely creating authentic cross-cultural communication contexts. This results in students’ inability to apply acquired knowledge to real-life scenarios, manifesting as the “Theory-Practice Disconnection” in cultural learning. Such a fossilized teaching method fails not only to ignite students’ interest in learning, but also to enhance their intercultural communication competence, resulting in superficial cultivation of intercultural communication competence, impeding its effective implementation <sup>[3]</sup>.

### ***3.3 Inadequate Faculty Competencies Failing to Meet Instructional Demands***

Cultural communication teaching poses high requirements from teachers, demanding not only robust English proficiency, but also a comprehensive repository of Chinese-Western cultural literacy and evidence-based intercultural teaching strategies. However, current deficiencies in tertiary-level English instruction manifest in three critical dimensions: some educators lack structured intercultural knowledge training, rendering them unable to navigate Sino-Western cultural distinctions; others possess insufficient authentic teaching experience to facilitate student-centered cross-cultural exchanges; while a third cohort prioritizes linguistic mechanics at the expense of cultural transmission. This triad of shortcomings collectively undermines pedagogical efficacy, failing to cultivate students' intercultural communicative competence.

### ***3.4 Monolithic Assessment Frameworks Misaligned with Strategic Objectives***

Current tertiary-level English teaching assessment still mainly relies on written tests, focusing on evaluating students' linguistic knowledge and grammar proficiency, seriously neglecting the examination of intercultural communicative competence. Even though there are a few oral assessments, they are mostly simple conversation practice, lacking simulation of cross-cultural communication scenarios and examination of cultural expression capabilities. This monolithic assessment method makes many students devote all their energy to memorizing linguistic knowledge points, as well as preparing for exams, while neglecting the cultivation of their intercultural communicative competence, failing to ignite their interest in learning about different cultures and engaging in related activities, thereby impeding the establishment of cultural confidence [4].

## **4. Cultivation Pathways for Intercultural Communicative Competence in Tertiary-level English Education from the Perspective of Cultural Confidence**

### ***4.1 Optimizing Instructional Content to Achieve Reciprocal Integration of Chinese and Western Cultures***

Teaching content serves as the cornerstone for cultivating intercultural communicative competence. It is necessary to rectify the prevailing pedagogical asymmetry favoring Western cultural paradigms over indigenous traditions to forge transformative synergies through reciprocal Chinese-Western cultural illumination. The first is to select an appropriate amount of Western cultural elements, avoiding the mere transmission of cultural knowledge. Instead, the focus should be on enabling students to understand the essence of Western culture and the values, and thinking patterns it embodies, enhancing students' awareness of diverse cultures and facilitate them to objectively view Chinese-Western cultural distinctions, thereby preventing cultural misunderstandings. The second is to enrich the content of excellent Chinese culture, adding instructional content on traditional Chinese culture, traditional virtues, and China's development achievements on the basis of textbooks to teach students how to express excellent Chinese culture in English, such as traditional Chinese festivals, traditional craftsmanship, Chinese spirit, etc., solidifying the foundations for native culture while learning Western culture, learning to disseminate Chinese culture in English. In addition, based on the students' major fields and personal preferences, life-proximate cross-cultural materials can be infused into the courses to enhance their life-relevance and foster students' learning motivation.

### ***4.2 Innovating Teaching Models to Strengthen Praxis-oriented Pedagogy***

It is essential to transcend the traditional teaching methods and adopt the "theory + practice" teaching methodology so as to truly implement intercultural teaching. The first method is the situational teaching methodology, conducting simulated shopping, conversation, speech competition, and other activities in real-life contexts and in cross-cultural communication scenarios to cultivate students' intercultural communicative competence in contexts, such as simulating Chinese-Western festival exchanges and cross-cultural business negotiations, thereby amplifying students' adaptive responsiveness in extemporaneous contexts. The second method is group cooperative learning, dividing students into several groups, enabling them to engage in discussions, debates, role-playing and other activities centered around cross-cultural themes. For instance, they can conduct inquiry-based learning on the issues such as "Chinese-Western Etiquette Distinctions" and "Global Projection of China's Excellent

Cultural Heritage” to deepen their understanding of different cultures and enhance their communicative competence during the exchange process. The third method is to leverage online resources, establishing online learning platforms to feed some video clips, documentaries, English public accounts and other content related to cross-cultural exchanges to students for self-directed learning after class, so as to broaden their cross-cultural perspectives, and concurrently, encouraging them to use the online platforms to communicate with foreign classmates or foreign teachers, and accumulate experience [5].

#### ***4.3 Enhancing Faculty Competencies to Fortify Instructional Foundations***

Faculty is the cornerstone for cross-cultural communication teaching. Various measures should be taken to enhance the intercultural teaching capabilities of teachers. The first is to conduct specialized training, frequently organizing English teachers to participate in learning exchanges related to intercultural teaching, and comparative studies of Chinese-Western cultures, enabling them to acquire more cross-cultural knowledge and fortify their cultural cognition capacity as well as their intercultural teaching capabilities. The second is to guide teachers to engage in teaching research work, enabling them to, grounded in their own classroom teaching practice, seek appropriate intercultural teaching methodologies for students, and summarize and reflect on their teaching process, thereby continuously improving their teaching capabilities. The third is to establish communication channels, supporting teachers in leaving classrooms to participate in various forms of cross-cultural exchange activities or to interact and collaborate with English teachers from other universities, learning from new educational philosophy and techniques, and inviting foreign teachers and cross-cultural scholars to give lectures, providing teachers with an opportunity to learn and draw inspirations. Universities should keep pace with the times, update the course content, improve the organization and presentation forms of the course content, emphasize intra-disciplinary knowledge integration and interdisciplinary integration, establish academic quality standards based on the course content and according to core competency development to guide and assist teachers in grasping the depth and breadth of instructional delivery, and amplify the guidance efficacy by increasing academic requirements, pedagogical cues, and exemplar assessment cases, etc.

#### ***4.4 Refining Assessment Frameworks to Amplify Strategic Guidance Efficacy***

It is essential to establish scientific and rational evaluation frameworks to eschew the sole written test assessment method, focus on the examination of intercultural communicative competence, and exert good guidance efficacy. On the one hand, it is necessary to refine the evaluation content, and add assessments of intercultural cognition capacity, cultural expression capabilities, and intercultural communicative competence on top of the existing ones. On the other hand, it is also necessary to diversify and improve the evaluation methods, employing “Process-oriented evaluation + summative evaluation”. The process-oriented evaluation predominantly examines students’ classroom interaction, group cooperation, and performance in practical activities. The summative evaluation can be conducted through oral interviews, scenario simulations, or cultural expression reports to assess students’ intercultural communicative competence. Concurrently, it is necessary to enhance the application of the evaluation results, providing timely feedback on the evaluation results to the students themselves, and based on their existing problems, and offering targeted proposals to facilitate them to autonomously amplify their intercultural communicative competence and establish cultural confidence. Furthermore, universities should infuse intercultural communicative competence assessment into the evaluation of teachers’ teaching quality and the assessment of the quality of talent cultivation, achieving assessment-driven teaching and assessment-driven learning to promote the effective integration of teaching methodologies and evaluation mechanisms. When carrying out this work, they must consider the varying linguistic proficiency, cultural and personality traits of each student to prevent overly strict and rigid requirements from affecting fairness and rationality. Additionally, they can diversify evaluation entities, adding teachers, classmates, internship mentors, etc. to ensure accurate and reliable evaluation results. Universities should institutionalize a sustained and systematic feedback and evaluation system, enabling students to consciously

emphasize cultural differences in their daily study and living contexts, develop their communication skills, and enhance their comprehension of different cultures. Upholding a methodology integrating scientific and rational assessment with targeted tutoring not only facilitates to significantly improve students' holistic intercultural communicative competence, but also fortifies their cultural rootedness as Chinese citizens through intercultural engagement, while broadening global horizons via reciprocal learning—cultivating cosmopolitan citizens with Chinese ethos and global consciousness.

## 5. Conclusion

Cultivating college English intercultural communicative competence from the perspective of cultural confidence is an effective approach to promoting linguistic education reform, enhancing students' holistic competencies, and carrying forward excellent traditional Chinese culture. Current intercultural teaching of college English suffers from systemic educational deficiencies such as instructional content imbalance, pedagogical obsolescence, faculty competence gaps, and reductionist assessment mechanisms, impeding the cultivation of students' intercultural communicative competence and the establishment of their cultural confidence. Therefore, universities should carry out reform based on their institution realities, transcending traditional teaching models by diversifying teaching resources, improving teaching methods, strengthening faculty development, and refining the evaluation systems to engineer life-contextualized, culture-embedded, and precision-calibrated intercultural classrooms, and empower students with robust linguistic proficiency as the foundation, simultaneously fortifying their cultural self-assurance and intercultural communicative competence—enabling steadfast assertion of cultural confidence during global engagements while synergistically advancing linguistic capability and humanistic literacy—thereby advancing the strategic implementation of cultural confidence.

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