

# EXPLORING THE REFORM OF COLLEGE ENGLISH CLASS IN “TELLING CHINA’S STORIES WELL”

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**Abstract:** China’s international communication capability does not match the significant achievements it has made and the outstanding contributions it has made to the world. To address this contradiction, scholars majoring in international communication proposed the international communication approach of “telling China’s stories well.” The college English class has both advantages and challenges in telling China’s stories well. While striving to enhance teachers’ comprehensive humanistic literacy and improve students’ narrative abilities, it is also necessary to continue exploring scientific guidance for practicing “telling China’s stories well” in college English teaching; the application of multi-modal teaching methods; and the establishment of a systematic and comprehensive multivariate evaluation system at the evaluation level.

**Keywords:** Telling China’s stories well; College English teaching; Multi-modal teaching methods

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In today's world, rapid economic development coexists with economic crises, cultural hegemony, global pandemics, and civilization conflicts. China's adherence to the path of socialist development with Chinese characteristics has led to tremendous success, including economic prosperity, social stability and unity, commitment to peaceful development, promotion of common development, upholding international fairness and justice, and making significant contributions to safeguarding world peace and stability. However, China's international communication capability is not strong, and the international public opinion landscape remains tilted against China, with Western media dominating global public opinion. Often, we find ourselves unable to articulate our positions or effectively disseminate our messages. Famous scholars have emphasized the importance of "telling China's stories well" as an optimal approach to international communication at key academic conferences, namely, presenting a true, three-dimensional, and comprehensive view of China through storytelling[1]. China's development achievements, momentum, and international contributions have given the Chinese people confidence and courage to continue along the Chinese path, and also provided us with the conviction to guide international public opinion. As a public compulsory course in higher education, the college English class is rich in content, involves a large number of teachers and students, and substantial class hours, giving it significant advantages in "telling China's stories well." Language is closely linked to culture, and the college English class inherently has cross-cultural and interdisciplinary characteristics. College English education should keep pace with the times, comply with the trend of internationalization in teaching, and actively explore pathways to tell China's stories well during the teaching process. By doing so, it can enhance students' English language competency while simultaneously boosting their international communication capabilities, the influence of Chinese culture, and strengthening China's international voice.

## 2 FEASIBILITY OF "TELLING CHINA'S STORIES WELL" IN COLLEGE ENGLISH COURSES

In the face of the ever-changing international situations, "telling China's stories well" is one of the crucial components of China's cultural publicity. China's stories are rich in connotations, encompassing both the cultural accumulation of five thousand years and the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics. College English courses possess unique advantages in "telling China's stories."

### 2.1 The Urgency of "Telling China's Stories Well"

China's achievements in socialist modernization are remarkable, with its overall national strength significantly enhanced and its impact on world peace and stability significant. The world has never before held such high expectations for China. However, Western countries led by the United States harbor ingrained arrogance and hostility towards China. Leveraging their media dominance, they frequently defame and slander China. Misled by media and politicians and shielded from certain information, Western citizens know little about China's development and progress. Relevant data indicates that Associated Press, United Press International, Reuters, and Agence France-Presse currently control the international public opinion channels, accounting for over 80% of the world's daily news output[2]. In the face of unprecedented changes in the world in the past century, as the Chinese nation enters a critical period of great rejuvenation, it has become increasingly urgent to disseminate China's voice, showcase the country's positive image, and break the stereotypes perpetuated by Western media for a long time. In August 2013, the concept of "telling China's stories well" was first proposed by some scholars and its importance was reiterated in the following years in order to

present a true, three-dimensional, and comprehensive image of China to the world, and to showcase a credible, endearing, and admirable image of China[3]. Telling China's stories well and disseminating China's voice are not only to meet national needs but also the responsibility of every Chinese citizen, particularly contemporary college students as future builders and successors.

## **2.2 Interpretation of the Connotations of "China Story"**

Regarding the connotations of "China Story," different scholars have provided various interpretations. Xiao Weiqing (2024) believes that "China Story" refers to matters or events related to the cultural traditions, values, experiences, and emotions of the Chinese nation[4]. It is a concrete manifestation of Chinese culture from a communication perspective, which can be either official or folk foreign cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries. Chang Haichao holds that China's Story encompasses matters or events associated with the Chinese people, as well as the cultural traditions and values of the Chinese nation. China Story originates from China but belongs to the world, based on history while guiding the future. Tian Liu et al. classify the thematic types of China Story into stories about China's path, the Chinese Dream, the Chinese people, Chinese culture, and China's development. Wang Xiaohui argues that without telling the stories of China's 56 ethnic groups, China's story would be incomplete; without telling the stories of Chinese culture, China's story would lack vividness; and without telling the story of today's China, China's story would be unimaginable and unspecific[5]. These various interpretations are theoretical contributions made by Chinese scholars to the concept of "telling China's story well."

## **2.3 Advantages of "Telling China's Story Well" in College English Courses**

Enhancing international communication capabilities, promoting a better understanding and recognition of China by the world, and facilitating exchanges and mutual learning among human civilizations have been written into the "Law of the People's Republic of China on Foreign Relations." "Telling "China's Story" well and disseminating China's own voice have been elevated to an important strategic position." Telling China's story well" in English has become a significant mission and teaching goal of English education at this crucial historical juncture. College English courses serve as compulsory courses for non-English majors in higher education institutions, constituting an essential part of higher education. Characterized by long class hours and vast participants, these courses enable students from various majors to use English as a tool to narrate "China's Story" from different aspects of China's historical development. Based on their professional thinking, students can gain a deeper understanding of cultural differences between China and the West through the study of English language and culture. When students from different majors study together, their diverse ways of thinking collide, fostering the development of divergent and critical thinking among them. Some scholars advocate for introducing communication concepts into the development of foreign language majors in the new era, or for the integrated development of foreign language majors and communication majors, which aligns better with national development needs. The construction of new liberal arts disciplines requires interdisciplinary integration and the merging of similar professional clusters. College English courses provide opportunities and scenarios for interdisciplinary integration. Encouragingly, with the development and progress of English education in China's basic education stage, many non-English majors have reached a high level of English proficiency, laying the foundation for interdisciplinary integration. They will become a vital force in telling "China's Story" in the future. However, as a course, college English also faces certain challenges in "telling China's story well".

## **3 CHALLENGES OF COLLEGE ENGLISH COURSES IN "TELLING CHINA'S STORIES WELL"**

Initially, the instrumental nature of English education was given priority, leading to textbooks that are predominantly based on British and American reading materials, with a lack of Chinese elements. University students tend to prioritize their specialized courses and overlook the importance of college English classes. Most college English teachers graduated from English departments within foreign language schools, resulting in a homogeneous knowledge structure among teachers and inadequate knowledge reserves for "telling China's stories well."

### **3.1 Lack of Chinese Culture Elements in Textbooks**

The large-scale development of English education originated from the country's open-door policy. To enable students to learn English well, most of the materials in textbooks are sourced from articles written by authors from Britain and the United States, covering topics such as values, lifestyles, religious beliefs, and other contents related to Western countries. There is little content about traditional Chinese culture in college English textbooks[6], which is detrimental to building our own discourse system and even more so to cultivating students' ability to "tell China's stories well". The disconnection between classroom teaching content and national development hinders students' understanding of the country's development and changes in the international situation, as well as their cultivation of an international perspective and global competence. Although many college English textbooks come with supporting teaching platforms, teaching activities still revolve around printed textbooks, and the role of these platforms has not been fully leveraged. The exercise forms designed in textbooks, such as fill-in-the-blanks, multiple choice, true-or-false questions, and other

objective question types, do not effectively cultivate students' innovative and critical thinking, nor do they effectively enhance their cross-cultural communication skills and storytelling abilities.

### 3.2 Students' Low Level of Attention to the Course

Students attach far less importance to college English, a compulsory selective course, than to their specialized courses. The size of college English classes is often big and there are too many students in one class, making it difficult to motivate all students in classroom activities. Mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets adversely affect students' classroom attention. A survey by scholars has found that 42.5% of college students suffer from internet addiction[7], with online entertainment being a significant external temptation. In college English classes, students come from different majors and have varying levels of English proficiency. Students with a poor foundation in English simply aim to pass the final exam. Since college English textbooks share some similarities with high school English textbooks to a certain extent, English learning lacks challenges for students with good English competency, and therefore their interest is not high.

### 3.3 Insufficient Knowledge Base of Teachers

From the perspective of academic relations, most college English teachers are graduates with master's or doctoral degrees in English majors, with their specialties encompassing British and American literature, English linguistics, English-Chinese translation, and English teaching methodology. For a long time, English education in Chinese universities has focused on learning and understanding the history, culture, and values of target language countries, while neglecting the incorporation of Chinese cultural content. Therefore, the knowledge structure of these teachers does not align well with the ability to "tell China's stories well". Their limited professional knowledge hinders their solid and thorough understanding of "China's stories." Furthermore, some scholars believe that teachers lack of sufficient humanistic qualities, ideological awareness, and adequate understanding of major historical and influential events.

## 4 APPROACHES TO "TELLING CHINA'S STORIES WELL" IN COLLEGE ENGLISH COURSES

To effectively enhance the ability of both teachers and students to "tell China's stories well" in college English courses, teachers must first improve their own capacity to disseminate Chinese culture by integrating teaching materials to overcome the limitations of textbooks. Students need to recognize their responsibility to "tell China's stories well" and enhance their storytelling abilities. In the information age, adopting multimodal teaching methods in college English instruction can enhance teaching effectiveness and student engagement.

### 4.1 Teachers Integrate Teaching Resources to Overcome Textbook Shortcomings

College English teachers must first recognize the importance of "telling China's stories well" in building the national discourse system. They should enrich their knowledge structure, keep abreast of national development policies and major influential events, and gain a thorough understanding of China's stories. By reading Chinese and English literature on Chinese culture, development, and core socialist values, they can improve their ability to "tell China's stories." "China's stories" are created by the Chinese people, with everyone being both the creator and the teller of these stories. People from different educational backgrounds and social experiences focus on different perspectives and cover different aspects of social life when telling "China's stories." As a group with relatively high educational proficiency in English, college English teachers should naturally shoulder the responsibility of conveying China's good voice. Through scientific research achievements, theoretical exploration, and technological innovation, they can change the stereotype held by the Western academic community that China lags behind in scientific research. By proposing unique solutions to problems faced by humanity, they can enhance foreign people's cognition and identification with China's experiences, path, system, and culture, thereby altering the negative image of China portrayed by Western mainstream media. Based on improving their own ability to "tell China's stories well", college English teachers should learn to integrate different types of college English textbooks. In line with the requirements of educational digitization, college English textbooks are continuously exploring new forms based on the internet. However, the construction of new forms of foreign language textbooks is still in its early stages. Given the current dominance of British and American reading materials in college English textbooks, teachers should fully utilize newly published textbooks with innovative formats available on the market during lesson preparation. They should search for and expand teaching materials with Chinese elements as much as possible, encouraging students to discuss and reflect on the rich connotations of China's stories. Additionally, incorporating materials related to countries along the "Belt and Road" can help students improve their cross-cultural awareness, cultivate cultural self-awareness, and enhance cultural confidence.

### 4.2 Enhancing the Ability of University Students to Tell "China's Stories" Well

To improve the ability to "tell China's stories well", university students must first possess a sense of contributing to national development, coupled with a strong sense of patriotism, national self-confidence and pride. For non-English

majors, it is crucial to clarify the channels through which they can effectively "tell China's stories well."

#### **4.2.1 Enhancing university students' awareness of "Telling China's Stories Well"**

Language and culture are closely intertwined, with language serving as the carrier of culture and culture constituting the content of language. The dissemination and development of culture are inseparable from language. The process of educating students through college English teaching is not only a journey for students to acquire English language skills but also a process of understanding and recognizing both Chinese and Western cultures. Essentially, it involves cultural understanding and identification, cultural reflection and criticism, as well as cultural awakening and self-confidence. Many university students in China lack awareness of the importance and urgency of "telling China's stories well" and have not recognized their responsibilities as future leaders of the world. College English courses should effectively utilize the cross-cultural characteristics of English language learning, deeply explore Chinese elements in textbooks, strive to trace the historical context of Chinese culture, and elucidate the deep-seated connotations of China's stories. By enlightening students with profound traditional Chinese stories, these courses aim to enhance students' wisdom and cultivation, deepen their absorption of Chinese culture, and gradually internalize it into their own humanistic spirit, including their outlook on life, values, and social responsibility, thereby strengthening their patriotism. Furthermore, the courses should cultivate students' national pride, identity, and cultural confidence by presenting the great history and achievements of new China's development. Cultural confidence is a more fundamental, profound, and enduring force in the development of a country and a nation. A high degree of cultural confidence lays the foundation for cultural prosperity and the great rejuvenation of the nation. Through the examination and synchronic comparison of Chinese and Western cultures, students not only enhance their cultural cultivation but also exercise and improve their critical thinking, speculative abilities, and intercultural communication skills.

#### **4.2.2 Clarifying channels for university students to "Tell China's Stories Well"**

University students are mentally mature and possess self-learning abilities. Born in the information age, they have convenient and extensive access to the internet and can readily obtain useful information. After completing their high school studies, university students have acquired basic English language skills. However, the current teaching method adopted by college English teachers in most universities in China primarily focuses on grammar-translation and aims to help students pass CET-4 and CET-6 exams, emphasizing the cultivation and training of basic language knowledge and skills[5]. This approach clearly does not align with the teaching goals of college English and fails to meet the requirements of students' personal development. College English teachers need to shift their teaching philosophy to a student-centered approach, fully mobilizing students' enthusiasm while effectively playing a leading role in guiding students' exploratory learning. Teachers should encourage students to make full use of library databases, enhance their rational and logical thinking through in-depth reading, and overcome fragmented thinking caused by rapid, shallow reading on mobile devices such as smartphones. In this way, students will no longer judge issues related to China solely based on subjective feelings but will instead draw conclusions after gaining a comprehensive understanding of China. There are two main channels for university students to "tell China's stories" in college English classes: First, students can enhance their ability to disseminate Chinese culture among international audiences by sharing their personal life experiences and inner emotions in English. By using accessible and relatable communication channels and methods, they can make the dissemination of Chinese culture more accessible and inspiring, providing powerful evidence for official publicity. By utilizing multimedia channels such as images, animations, and short videos from a first-person perspective, university students can share the real-life experiences and subjective feelings of contemporary Chinese college students, creating authentic life scenarios. These vivid stories about individuals, hometowns, cities, and the country will be more appealing and popular among international audiences[8]. Second, by reading English literature related to their majors, students can understand and grasp the international academic frontier of their fields, using English as a tool to improve their scientific research awareness and skills. By writing papers in the academic discourse of their disciplines, students can lay the foundation for future participation in international academic exchanges and cooperation.

### **4.3 Application of Multimodal Teaching Methods**

Technological advancements have facilitated reforms in college English teaching. The student-centered teaching philosophy dictates that English instruction should consider students' needs, concerns, and difficulties, and provide them with high-quality learning resources. Students' needs, learning backgrounds, interests, language proficiency, and learning abilities can be quickly identified through online surveys or relevant testing tools, laying a solid foundation for differentiated instruction. Different teaching goals and learning tasks are set for students of varying proficiency levels. Teaching methods are no longer confined to textual representations; online courses and video explanations free students from the constraints of time and space. Virtual reality and augmented reality technologies enable student participation and create vivid learning scenarios for them. With the development of digital intelligence, multimodal teaching has garnered attention among university teachers. Multimodal teaching refers to integrating multimodal elements such as language, images, sounds, and movements into the most effective means of meaning expression and communication under the guidance of multimodal discourse analysis theory, and guiding students to construct meaning through multimodal means[7]. The introduction of multimodal teaching methods can make the telling of China's stories more vivid and diverse, thereby stimulating students' enthusiasm for learning and sharing China's stories.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Cultivating English talents with an international perspective who can tell China's stories to the international community is one of the teaching objectives of college English courses. On the one hand, students in college English classes can tell personal stories to foreign people through multimedia; on the other hand, they can combine their majors with English to express their academic views to the international academic community. Teachers and students of college English courses have a positive attitude and evaluation towards the goal of "telling China's stories well," but they lack scientific guidance at the operational level and a comprehensive evaluation system at the assessment level. The ability of college students to personally disseminate Chinese culture and tell stories is not a simple addition of English skills and other abilities; it requires systematic training. The topic of non-English majors telling China's stories in English to enhance the dissemination of Chinese culture needs further exploration by interested scholars.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

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