Coupling Pathways of Foreign Language Courses and Region-specific Culture in China's Local Universities

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of globalization and cultural diversity, foreign language education in universities shoulders the dual mission of educating students with both international perspectives and national features. This paper is intended to explore the coupling paths for systematically integrating region-specific culture into foreign language courses in China's local universities. the article first analyzes the core values of this integration for avoiding aphasia of native Chinese culture, serving regional economic and social development, reshaping the characteristics of foreign language courses, and generating students' learning interest. Furthermore, it also examines the practical dilemmas faced in the current coupling process, such as the lack of top-level design, the fragmentation of teaching contents, the insufficient cultural literacy of teachers, and the singular evaluation methodology. Finally, this paper constructs a multi-level, whole-process coupling path system, proposing systematic reforms from the four-core links of objective reconstruction——content construction—teaching implementation—evaluation feedback. It emphasizes the key supporting roles of teachers' professional development and digital resources, hoping to provide theoretical references and practical paradigms for the reform of foreign language teaching in Chinese local universities.

Keywords: University Foreign Language Courses; Region-Specific Culture; Coupling Mechanism

1. Introduction

With the in-depth development of China's Belt and Road Initiative and the proposition of the era's task of Introducing China to the World, China's higher foreign language education is undergoing a paradigm shift from a purely instrumental focus to one that emphasizes both humanistic and instrumental perspectives.

However, for a long time, foreign language teaching in Chinese universities, regardless of location, has predominantly focused on the input and understanding of the target language country's culture in its course contents and cultural orientation, unintentionally creating a state of aphasia among students towards their own national culture, especially the profound and unique regional culture of their locality. They can fluently discuss foreign customs but struggle to accurately and vividly introduce fluently their local customs, historical traditions, and development achievements to the world in a foreign language.

Local universities are important strongholds for the inheritance and innovation of regional culture. Curriculum delivery of foreign language courses is closely linked to the needs of regional economic and social development. In this context, the marriage of regional characteristic culture into foreign language courses is no longer an optional teaching embellishment but a strategic measure pertaining to the quality of program delivery, the establishment of cultural confidence, and the capacity to serve the local communities. It is not only the concrete implementation of the values education in the foreign language discipline but also an inevitable choice for foreign language majors in local universities to achieve differentiated development and form distinctive characteristics in fierce competition.

This paper aims to systematically address the two core questions of why to couple and how to couple. By explaining its multiple values, analyzing practical difficulties, and ultimately constructing an operable and evaluable integration pathway system, it seeks to promote regional characteristic culture from being the backdrop to taking center stage in foreign language teaching, educating foreign language majors who can both look to the world and take root in the local communities.

2. Values of Integrating Regional

Characteristic Culture into Foreign Language Courses in Local Universities

2.1 Resolving Native Culture Aphasia and Building Cultural Confidence

The phenomenon of native culture aphasia in foreign language learning is a prominent manifestation of underdeveloped cross-cultural communicative competence. Integrating regional culture into the curriculum is a direct remedy for this prevalent issue. Through systematic learning, students may be able to accumulate professional foreign language expressions related to local history, philosophy, art, and folklore, thus building a discourse system for intercultural communication about local culture. In learning and practice, students are no longer merely passive recipients of foreign culture but become active interpreters and communicators of local culture. This shift from input to output greatly enhances students' strong sense of cultural identity and pride. Their love for hometown extends to profound confidence in national culture, which fundamentally strengthens the cultural foundation of instilling values through education.

2.2 Serving Regional Development and Empowering Local Internationalization Processes

College education must resonate with local needs. With the continuous improvement of opening-up levels across regions, international exchanges in fields such as economy, trade, tourism, culture, and education are increasingly getting more and more frequent. There is an urgent social need for college graduates who are not only proficient in foreign languages but also familiar with the cultural heritage of the locality and understand the characteristics of local industries. For example, foreign language graduates in Anyang need to be able to introduce the Yin Ruins and Oracle Bone Inscriptions to the world; graduates from Jingdezhen are supposed to explain the millennium charm of ceramic art. Integrating regional culture into the curriculum essentially precisely meets the local demand for talents in positions related to international communication, foreign-related tour guiding, foreign trade negotiations, and international exhibitions. It enables graduates to possess stronger employment competitiveness and career development potential, directly empowering the building of a soft environment for local internationalization.

2.3 Reshaping Course Characteristics and Promoting the Connotative Development of Foreign Language Majors

In today's context of serious homogenization tendency in higher education, how foreign language majors in local universities can build their own characteristics is a crucial issue for survival and future development. Deep integration of regional culture provides a unique breakthrough for the connotative development in this respect. Universities may make use of this to create characteristic course clusters like Foreign Language+Regional Culture. They may offer courses like Foreign Translation of Local Culture, Foreign-related Practice in Regional Economy, and Foreign Language for Local Tourism. This can not only enrich teaching resources but also form a distinct professional brand, attract students that have interest, and spur new growth points in academic research such as Research on the Intercultural Communication of Regional Culture. They may achieve a virtuous interaction between teaching and research.

2.4 Generating Learning Motivation and Enhancing Comprehensive Cross-Cultural Communicative Competence

Pure language skill training can easily make students feel bored and lose interest. Regional culture, however, is the environment in which students are born and raised, possessing a natural sense of closeness and emotional connection. Using the local culture as materials for foreign language learning can place abstract grammar and vocabulary in specific, vivid contexts, greatly stimulating students' learning interest and desire for expressions. In the meantime, the essence of cross-cultural communication is reciprocal. Through continuous comparison, analysis, and translation of native and foreign cultures, students' critical thinking and cultural communication skills will be deeply exercised, thus forming a more mature and balanced cross-cultural perspective, achieving the shift from language ambassador to cultural ambassador.

3. Practical Dilemmas in Integrating Region-Specific Culture

Despite its significant values, the path to integration still faces many challenges in practice, rooted in systemic, resource-based, and

conceptual constraints.

3.1 Lack of Top-Level Design Leads to Fragmented Integration

A fundamental obstacle may be the absence of strategic planning at the institutional level. Many universities fail to incorporate regional cultural integration into blueprints or departmental strategic plans of foreign language programs. As a consequence, integration efforts are often sporadic and personality-driven, reliant largely on the personal interest and initiative of individual instructors. For instance, a literature teacher might briefly make a special mention of a local historical figure, or a translation class might include a few sentences about a regional festival as an exercise. This ad hoc approach results in what can be termed as fragmented integration—cultural elements appear as isolated, decorative additions rather than as woven threads running consistently through the curriculum. Without a coordinated, program-wide framework that defines learning outcomes, sequences content progressively, and allocates dedicated resources, these efforts remain superficial and may go in vain. They fail to create a coherent learning trajectory where students systematically build upon their knowledge and skills in introducing regional culture, which ultimately diminishes the educational impact and does not achieve the intended transformation in students' communicative competence and cultural identity.

3.2 Scarcity of Teaching Contents and Lack of Resources

The lack of authoritative, pedagogically sound, and systematically organized teaching materials has turned out to be a critical bottleneck. Mainstream foreign language textbooks are designed for a national or global market and thus inherently lack specific regional cultural contents. It is a daunting task to develop in-house, institution-specific textbooks or teaching modules. It requires a significant investment of time, funding, and, most crucially, a team with dual expertise: deep scholarly knowledge of the local culture and high proficiency in pedagogically sound foreign language instruction and translation. the process involves not merely translating existing Chinese materials but recreating cultural contents in the target language in a way that is accurate, culturally appropriate, and engaging for learners. This

resource gap creates a dilemma, where even the most willing teachers still lack the foundational tools to implement integration effectively in a sustained and quality-assured manner.

3.3 Insufficient Teachers' Awareness and Literacy

The professional preparedness of front-line teachers itself presents a significant challenge. Most foreign language faculty are trained in linguistics, literature, or applied linguistics related to the country of target language. They have profound expertise in the socio-cultural skills of the target language. However, their systematic knowledge of their own local culture—its history, philosophy, arts, and intangible heritage—may be informal or fragmented. More critically, they often lack the specific foreign language vocabulary, discursive patterns, and translation strategies required to engage in teaching effectively. Many teachers themselves experience a form of professional aphasia when attempting to discuss complex local cultural concepts in the target language. This knowledge and competency gap leads to a sense of anxiety and inadequacy, making teachers hesitant to venture beyond the comfort zone of standard textbook content. Without targeted support, the gap between the noble intention to integrate and the practical ability to do so successfully remains wide.

3.4 Singular Evaluation Mechanism

The prevailing assessment ecosystem does not incentivize the integration of regional culture. Student evaluation, both within courses and through high-stakes standardized tests like the College English Test (CET), overwhelmingly prioritizes the assessment of general language proficiency (listening, reading comprehension etc.) and standard communicative functions. Though CET tests are shifting, to a certain extent, to the introduction of Chinese culture in the translation session. There are still few, if any, mechanisms to formally assess a student's skills to describe a local historical site, explain a traditional custom, or advocate for a regional development project in a foreign language. This evaluation method powerfully directs both teaching and learning efforts. Students, strategically focused on achieving scores that impact graduation and employment, naturally prioritize practicing for these standardized assessments. Under pressure to deliver high test

passing rates, teachers are compelled to focus class time on test-related skills. This creates a disincentive for investing time in cultural contents that are perceived as extracurricular or non-essential to measurable outcomes. Thus, the lack of alignment between the proposed reform goals and the assessment system actively stifles innovation and undermines the motivation for deep, pedagogical change.

4. Countermeasures

The success of the proposed integration model is contingent upon robust support systems that address the human resources and institutional barriers identified above.

4.1 Improve Top-Level Institutional Design

For integration to move from a pilot project to standard practice, it must be embedded in the university's governance and resource allocation structures.

Integration in curricular documents. the commitment must be codified. This means explicitly incorporating competence in the foreign language expressions of regional culture into the official program learning outcomes of relevant foreign language programs. Correspondingly, specific course modules dedicated to regional culture should be listed as required or core elective courses in the teaching plan, with guaranteed teaching hours and credits, ensuring systematic rather than optional exposure for all students.

Dedicated resource allocation. Top-down financial support is of critical importance. Universities should establish special developmental funds to support the multi-year projects necessary for success: the compilation and publication of school-based textbooks; the technical development and maintenance of the digital culture corpus and terminology database; the establishment and management of off-campus practical teaching bases; and the funding for the teacher training programs described above.

Alignment of assessment and incentive ecosystem. Universities should lead reforms in evaluation. This includes encouraging and approving revised course assessment schemes that incorporate project work and cultural performance, as outlined in the path model. Furthermore, in institutional evaluations of teaching quality, departments and teachers who excel in this innovative integration work are supposed to receive formal recognition. Ultimately, creating a policy environment where teaching regional culture in foreign language classes is not an extra burden but a valued and rewarded component of professional responsibility is key to long-term sustainability.

4.2 Teaching Implementation

Project-based classroom teaching. Universities should change the teacher-centered lecture approach and widely adopt project-based learning (PBL) model. For example, teachers may assign tasks such as designing an English travel guide for your hometown, creating a multilingual promotional video for a local intangible cultural heritage project, or simulating a promotion meeting for a local enterprise targeting foreign friends. In the process of completing projects, students may have to collect information, collaborate in inquiry, and create outputs, allowing their comprehensive abilities to be fully exercised.

Normalized practical teaching. Classroom barriers may be broken down and teaching venues may extend to the broad social classroom. Stable practice bases with local museums, cultural and tourism bureaus, foreign-related enterprises, international schools, etc. may be taken into serious consideration. Students can be organized to serve as volunteer docents, event translators, intern assistants, etc. This not only allows students to test and enhance their learning in practice but also enables them to intuitively feel the value of learning and improve their sense of social responsibility.

Blended teaching mode. Online platforms can be fully utilized. Universities may engage in building corpus of regional culture and digital resources to carry out online autonomous learning and group discussions; high-quality supplementary resources using MOOCs, SPOCs, etc. may be introduced; social media may be used to guide students to follow and create foreign language contents related to regional culture.

4.3 Employ a Multifaceted Teacher Empowerment Strategy

To bridge frontline foreign language teachers' competency gap, a comprehensive and sustained professional development program is essential. This goes beyond one-off workshops to a structured empowerment plan.

Systematic thematic training. Universities should

organize regular, credit-bearing training series. These sessions should be co-taught by teams comprising: local culture scholars (historians, folklorists, intangible cultural heritage researchers) to provide authoritative content knowledge; master translators and practitioners from fields like international journalism, tourism promotion, or diplomatic translation, to share practical strategies for effective cross-cultural expression; and pedagogical experts in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) or project-based learning, to guide the design of effective teaching activities.

Interdisciplinary communities of practice. Universities should get involved in forming formal or informal teaching and research teams that cut across departmental lines. A sustainable model involves pairing foreign language teachers with colleagues from history, anthropology, tourism, or fine arts departments. These teams can collaborate on curriculum design, co-teach courses, and conduct joint research on the dissemination of regional culture. Such collaboration enriches the foreign language teacher's content knowledge while providing the subject expert with insights into linguistic and pedagogical challenges.

Incentives for engagement and innovation. Institutional policy must recognize and reward the extra work and intellectual contribution involved in this reform. Efforts in developing regional culture teaching modules, publishing high-quality translations of local texts, producing teaching videos on cultural sites, and conducting related pedagogical action research should be valued equally with traditional forms of scholarly output in performance reviews, promotion, and award systems. Establishing special grants for regional culture and foreign language teaching projects can provide crucial seed funding and demonstrate institutional commitment.

4.4 Process-Oriented and Pluralistic Assessment System

Universities should reform he singular final written exam evaluation method and establish a pluralistic assessment system focusing on competency evaluation.

Diversified assessment contents. Frontline foreign language instructors may incorporate project reports, oral presentations, translation works, practice reports, etc., into the assessment scope, focusing on evaluating the accuracy of cultural conveyance, the appropriateness of language use, and the effectiveness of communication strategies.

Diversified assessment subjects. Universities may introduce teacher evaluation, peer evaluation, student self-evaluation, and even invite external mentors from practice bases to participate in evaluation and provide multi-dimensional feedback.

Process-oriented assessment. Universities must be able to track and evaluate students' performances during project preparation and practice processes, not just focusing on the final outcomes.

5. Conclusion

Integrating regional characteristic culture into foreign language courses in local universities is a profound systematic project that echoes the new requirements of the new era for national foreign language capacity and talent cultivation. It is by no means a simple superposition of knowledge but a comprehensive innovation of educational philosophy, curriculum system, teaching methods, and evaluation models. Universities should construct an integration path with objective reconstruction as the guide, content construction as the foundation, teaching implementation as the core, and evaluation feedback as the driving force. At the same time, this reform must go with strong teacher guarantees and policy support. In this way, foreign language education in local universities can truly break through the homogenization dilemma and prepare all-round, applied international talents who possess excellent language skills for the job market. Hopefully, college graduates will be deeply rooted in cultural heritage, and can actively serve the locality. This not only injects vibrant regional vitality into the sustainable development of foreign language programs but also contributes indispensable grassroots strength to rebuilding cultural confidence and showing the world a true, multi-dimensional, and comprehensive China.

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