

# Chinese Cultural Identity Loss in Foreign Language Learning

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**Keywords:** Cultural hybridity; Cultural identity loss; Responsibility; The subjectivity.

**Abstract.** with the development of the global village and informational technology, people have to confront cultural hybridity and deal with embarrassing situations from mixed cultures. It is the usual fact that most Chinese people lose their cultural identity because of the blast wave from the rapid informational times, their own core value loss and their ignorance of traditional culture. In order to maintain their cultural identity, it advocates that the government should take action to focus the dominant educational resources for the fact of learning English. Furthermore, the subjectivity of teaching cannot shirk their responsibility of inheriting, developing and transmitting culture. Maybe the most important is to improve the cultural consciousness and cultural quality of whole people.

## Introduction

With the rapid development of informational technology and the rapid process of globalization, it is impossible for people to have a chance to experience a fully mono-cultural. Because of location, migration or mixed family, there is rare case of no mixed and combined cultures, so it is common for a large portion of the population in the world to be in the reality of cultural limbo. In China, almost every person is experiencing mixed cultures every day. Chinese people are crazy for learning English because English is connected with their different entrance examinations, their promotion, their professional qualifications, etc. but not because English plays an important role in their daily life. Therefore, more and more Chinese people choose to study English—that is so-called English fever in China. Even in Chinese kindergartens, more and more children begin to experience being positive to accept English which is completely different from their mother tongue. Language is, indeed, one of the most tangible markers of culture and is perhaps one of the greatest dividers by which cultures remain distinct from one another. As cultures change and evolve, the way in which individuals within a culture communicate both mirrors and guides its changes.[1] They make changes in order to meet the needs that one culture acquires to make up a person. To some extent, the more familiar a person is with a language, the more greatly the language shapes the person. In Chinese context, when people learn English, they have to face different mixed cultures.

## Related Definition

Due to globalization and English learning fever, it has rapidly impacted on people's life. Global culture and Chinese-English mixing culture have a great impact on Chinese students' attitudes and behaviors. During the process of learning English, they have to integrate their weak culture with the global dominant culture. This should take cultural hybridity into account. Hybridity can be defined as "an association of ideas, concepts, and themes that once reinforce and contradict each other". [2] In other words, people can describe cultural hybridity as mixing different thoughts and languages in order to create a new identity which differs from the natives in each individual culture. It seems like discarding the dregs and assimilating the best achievements of both worlds to build a new self different from self before and anyone else. How the individual interpret his own cultural identity before, how he view himself as part of both different cultures—those questions make every English teacher be lost in thought.

In the past, identity is usually linked with social and personal sense. Presently, it combines time social categories with the sources of an individual's self-respect or dignity simultaneously. But these things have no necessary linkage. In ordinary language, at least, one can use identity to refer to personal characteristics or attributes that cannot naturally be expressed in terms of a social category, and in some contexts certain categories can be described as identity even though no one sees them as central to their personal identity[3]. Nonetheless, in present incarnation, identity gives evidences to and provokes the idea that social categories have close relationship with the bases of an individual's self-respect.

Culture is bound up with all people's activity in a group. Bates and Plog proposed a descriptive definition: culture is a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that the members of a society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning. [4] This definition refers to that not only patterns of behavior but also patterns of thought constitute culture. Culture comprises a diversity of natural and intellectual phenomena, including religion and ideologies; artifacts, for example houses, works of art, tools and so on and culturally transmitted skills and techniques. Cultural identity is the identity of a group of members or culture, or of an individual as far as one is influenced by one's belonging to a group or culture. Both culture and cultural identity are dynamic concepts and keep changing: they are closely connected with what is going on for time being because they are continuously being transformed or becoming something new or different. Cultural identity, while rooted in places and histories, cannot be stable since views of history are continuously changing. So, cultural identity, while neither a stable or homogeneous entity, is continuously being repositioned or replanted from within and outside of the culture.[5]

Cultural identity loss, to some extent, means doubting self core value from his culture and avoiding using his culture style thinking because of a long time of no touching his culture or shock from other cultures. What's more important, reference to "who am I" and "where my culture develops", they cannot have a clear cognition.

### **The Phenomena of Cultural Identity Loss**

Spring Festival, Tomb-sweeping Day, Dragon Boat Festival, Mid-autumn Festival, etc.—almost all the Chinese tradition festivals come from the ancient. These traditional festivals in various forms, rich in contents, integrate as part of the long history of Chinese culture, which is the profound cultural background and origin of Chinese excellent cultures. Because of the cultural globalization, these festivals are losing their own charm. It is indisputable that more and more foreign festivals from the English-speaking countries are becoming more popular among Chinese people, so Chinese culture is confronted with obstacles and crisis. In China, its traditional festivals are placed in an awkward position while foreign festivals are highly regarded ones. During each foreign festival, the hustle and bustle makes people stunned; Chinese tradition festivals are quite cold and cheerless. Even some Chinese people do not know the exact dates of Spring Festival, let alone the Chinese Valentines' Day, which has to give way to western countries' Valentines' Day. Even to this day, it has not been made as a legal holiday. Most Chinese people celebrate the western Valentines' Day, not Chinese Valentines' Day and even they do not know what is Chinese Valentines' Day and the beautiful and miserable legend about the origin of Chinese Valentines' Day. In contrast, streets are full of romantic breath and honey wind: most young people queue for chocolate, roses and beautiful candies in order to greet their soul mates. Even Spring Festival, with most characteristics of Chinese festivals, also has desolate trend; Charismas has a great shock to Spring Festival because Chinese people, especially the youth, full of enthusiasm and passion, welcome and celebrate it, the streets and alleyways, decorated with lanterns and colored hangings.

Some Chinese people, dressing in suit and ties and speaking fluent English, forget to attend any ceremony to worship ancestors.

Here's a cold and hard fact: when it comes to festival holidays, nearly every Chinese student can speak things relating with these holidays more or less with fervor and assurance; when it comes to Chinese traditional holidays, Chinese students choose for collective aphasia. Many English teachers in China used to think students choose for collective aphasia because they pretend to forget their traditional culture or they are unwilling to speak out their ideas to share with others. What the fact most English teachers found is students do not know how to express their own thinking in English. In most cases of Chinese clashing English, the core value that Chinese advocates is completely different from that in English. Even they are contradictory with each other. Thinking styles also differ. The students are split in two: one is to maintain their own native culture and the other is apt to accept English culture. Over time, students' daily lives are full of western dominant culture: KFC, McDonald, Valentines' day, Fools' day, Halloween, Black Friday, Christmas, etc. That will lead to losing their own cultural identities. It is useless in inheriting and carrying forward Chinese traditional and excellent achievements because English, to some extent, provides unique insight into the ways that individuals think and act. Chinese teachers teaching English have to be in pondering over how to safeguard our tradition culture and national cultural identity.

### **The Reasons of Cultural Identity Loss**

When people begin to learn a foreign language, they want to become the insiders of the language even if they have different habits and different thinking style, speak different language and dress differently. They will probably accept those which learners evaluate positively because belonging to such a language group have a great positive effect on their learning proficiency of the language. In that case, they begin to avoid their cultural identity and conform to times' development and all the characteristics of the foreign language.

**Times Characteristics.** Informationization, globalization, technologization are constructing a new platform for Chinese economic development and social activities in the 21st century and they, meanwhile, will lead to a major transformation in the ways of international dialogue, economic growth and social organization. Because of the economic globalization and informationization, the rapid development of cultural diversity, it is normalized that international communication becomes increasingly frequent and people from different cultural backgrounds have closer contact. That cross-cultural communication has become common is the fact. Thanks to informationization and technologization, people can share cross-time and cross-domain information on the internet. During the process of sharing, humble and weak Eastern culture goes all the way to meet direct and dominant culture. In other words, eastern people usually choose to sacrifice their own value and ideas coming from their culture to adjust to the western dominant culture. That will cause to their losing cultural identity and creating a new different cultural identity to match the strong culture.

**Universal Ethical Principle Orientation.** Up until now, it cannot be denied that great changes have taken place in China but the core value of Chinese people is at a degree of chaos or loss. Therefore, in China, there are people everywhere who are busy trying to build a new value system. Some are searching for core values in Marxist theory, some have gone back 2000 years to Confucius to look for values, while others want to take from the speeches of central government leaders to fill in the traces of spiritual emptiness of 1.3 million people. Some people want to based on the current situation create something that advances with the times, that can at any time be used as a method for writing articles and can adapt and add to our core value system. Some people...[6]It comes to Obama's speech, he pointed out that the victory of his country is not from might or wealth, but from the enduring power of their ideals: democracy, liberty, opportunity and unyielding hope. Actually, these values were advocated two hundreds years ago and gradually perfected. A core value system is a values concept which is deep-rooted in people's minds and hearts and which cannot be randomly changed. The most serious problem today in China is that Chinese people have no their core value system; therefore, when they contact a new culture which has inheriting and clear core value, they are inclined to create a new cultural identity to integrate into a new language and culture. It is reflected

that an increasing number of young couples choose romantic western weddings, giving up traditional Chinese weddings.

**The Reality of Learning English.** It is acknowledged that English has become the most widely used language and the number of Chinese people learning English is increasing. Almost every Chinese person has to learn English because English has a great impact on their entrance schools and work promotion. But their English texts and materials are hardly related with Chinese traditional culture. Taking College English which is most widely used English-language textbook among colleges and universities as an example, there are 172 reading articles in and out of class and only ten of them introduce cultures and lives of Chinese and not English and American; that accounts for 5.8% of total. It is thus obvious that English textbooks repel Chinese native culture, so it is impossible for Chinese culture in English textbook to form systemic knowledge. For Chinese people learning Chinese culture, most of them begin to learn Chinese during in primary school. Their entering college, that means they have no relationship with systemic learning Chinese culture if they do not major in Chinese culture, because in most Chinese colleges and universities, there are no such general-knowledge courses. There exists fault system about Chinese culture learning for most of them. What's worse, the subjectivity of teaching, the teacher himself lack relating knowledge about culture and they cannot well explain and spread to the subjectivity of learning. What the subjectivity of teaching does is to emphasize target language input in fraud of the indigenous cultures. Meanwhile, they overstate and overemphasize the negative transfer of native culture on foreign culture learning, ignoring the positive effect of native culture on foreign culture learning. In that case, the students' culture is affected by foreign culture greatly and the foreign culture exerts a subtle influence on the students' character and value system, so it is easy for them to lose their own used thinking style and actions.

### **Implication in Foreign Language Teaching**

Let the world know about China and let China know about the world——this is not the slogan and it should be into action at once. Many foreigners misunderstand that China has no culture, so English teachers have unshirkable responsibility for inheriting and carrying forward Chinese fine traditions. How to avoid Chinese people's cultural identity loss during cross-communication is worthy of consideration for every English teacher in China.

To put it——avoiding Chinese people's cultural identity into implement needs the relevant policy assurance from the government, especially the cooperation from Education Department, because Education Department has ability to integrate excellent educational resources and form guiding foundation thought. Especially, Education Department can collect excellent English experts and teachers, who are familiar with the reality of Chinese people learning English, to compiling English textbooks suitable for Chinese students and China's actual conditions. Taking students' individual differences into account, they can enrich the students' outside reading materials because outside reading is the supplement and extends of inside reading, and also another gold key to open knowledge treasure-house. The other is also significant: guideline document, which can lead to teachers' teaching aim success and can give help for the teachers' classes.

The subjectivity of teaching plays an important role in cultivating students' cultural consciousness, cultural literacy and cultural identity. The subjectivity's personality charm, cultural literacy and cultural accumulations have a subtle influence on students' core value and cultural motivation. Teachers should have patience of tolerance and acceptance of cultural clash or cultural shock from different students. Knowing about students' cultural needs is helpful in teaching implementation and teachers' own cultural profundity and cultural accumulation provide a guarantee in teachers' editorial work of cultural accumulation, popularization and creation. Because of globalization and informationization, teachers would better have information literacy. Because it is convenient that websites can provide the information which has no predetermined time for teachers as long as they want to learn what they need to know and when they need to know it. Moreover, websites provide a

possibility that people can contact different ideas about the different cultures and they have no need to spend expensively across multiple time zones. The high sensitivity of information is important for them but that they should stick to their core value, stick up for their cultural identity among massive information is particularly important.

## Conclusion

English has an increasing importance in China, so it is not strange that more and more Chinese people are flocking to learn English. Certainly, the more convenience the internet times provides, the more chances Chinese people have to use English, but during the cultural clashes from foreign cultures, meeting new things and cross-communication, how to maintain Chinese people's cultural identity, create and spread Chinese culture are obviously and particularly important. On the basis of such Chinese learning English contexts, that Chinese people have to confront mixed cultures every day become possible. How to maintain our Chinese people's cultural identity is worth for every person to be in deep thought in the context of cultural hybridity. It points out that in most cases China's time of globalization, technologization and informationization, Chinese people's core value loss and the wind effect of English fever cause to Chinese people's cultural identity loss during cross-communication and mixed cultures. Therefore, the government and the subjectivity of teaching make every effort to make up for cultural identity loss in the fields of policies and regulations and actions. In addition, that the universal consciousness of the Chinese tradition is intensified and the ethical and cultural quality of the whole nation is promoted will not lead to the tragedy of cultural identity loss.

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