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From Cultural Cognition to Global Competence: A Teaching Design for Cultivating Intercultural Communicative Competence through Festival Discourse

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Abstract

Festival-themed discourses are important carriers of cultural connotations in high school English textbooks. However, current teaching practices often remain at the level of language knowledge explanation and superficial cultural comparison, lacking systematic cultivation of intercultural communicative competence and global competence. Taking the reading lesson *Spring Festival* from the Beijing Normal University High School English Textbook (Book 1, Unit 3) as a case study, and drawing on the three-dimensional framework of intercultural competence (cognitive understanding, affective attitudes, and behavioral skills) proposed by the Intercultural Research Center of Shanghai International Studies University, this paper designs layered and progressive teaching activities. It guides students from interpreting cultural differences between China and other countries to exploring the global dissemination of local culture, achieving an advancement from "cultural cognition" to "cultural identity" and then to "intercultural action," ultimately aiming at the cultivation of global competence. Teaching practice shows that this design effectively enhances students' cultural critical thinking, national pride, and international perspective, providing a feasible paradigm for festival-themed teaching in high school English.

Keywords

Intercultural Communicative Competence; Festival Discourse; Global Competence; High School English Teaching; Cultural Cognition

1. Introduction

The *National English Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools (2017 Edition, Revised in 2020)* explicitly identifies "cultural awareness" as one of the four core competencies of the English discipline, requiring students to understand the connotations of Chinese and foreign cultures in language learning and to develop

abilities in intercultural communication, cultural appreciation, and cultural dissemination. Festivals, as concrete carriers of national culture, embody a country's values, customs, and spiritual core, and are frequently occurring discourse types in high school English textbooks. The Beijing Normal University edition of high school English textbooks includes multiple festival-themed units, aiming to use authentic discourse contexts to enable students to perceive, compare, and disseminate cultures through language learning.

However, in frontline teaching, festival discourse instruction still suffers from various shortcomings: most teachers focus narrowly on vocabulary, sentence patterns, and textual details, neglecting the deeper cultural connotations behind the discourse; cultural teaching remains at a superficial level of "cultural phenomenon comparison," lacking in-depth exploration of cultural mindsets and values; and the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence lacks systematic design, with fragmented activities and vague objectives, making it difficult to achieve a progressive progression from cultural cognition to cultural identity and communicative practice. More critically, current teaching rarely connects intercultural competence cultivation with the development of global competence, failing to adequately guide students to view local culture from a global perspective or to provide value orientation toward "cultural dissemination" and "global responsibility."

Based on this, this paper raises the core research question: How can we design systematic teaching activities based on a single festival-themed reading discourse and a scientific intercultural competence framework, to cultivate high school students' intercultural communicative competence in a layered and progressive manner, and ultimately toward enhancing global competence? The author selects the reading lesson *Spring Festival* from Unit 3 of the Beijing Normal University High School English Textbook (Book 1) as a case study, and conducts teaching practice with the three-dimensional framework of intercultural competence from Shanghai International Studies University, exploring the implementation pathway of intercultural communicative competence through festival discourse, while extending the cultivation goal to students' global competence, providing a practical paradigm for cultural teaching in high school English.

2. In-depth Exploration of Intercultural Teaching Materials in Festival Discourse

2.1. Analysis of Intercultural Connotations in the Textbook Discourse

The selected reading text is a magazine reader-interview piece about the Spring Festival, a traditional Chinese festival. It presents the festive experiences and inner reflections of three narrators with different identities, forming a triple narrative perspective: “outsider – returnee – inheritor.” Its intercultural value can be interpreted from three dimensions: **What** (content), **Why** (purpose),

and **How** (discourse features).

From the content dimension (What): The three narrators' identities and perspectives naturally create intercultural and intergenerational comparisons. The first narrator, Tom, is an exchange student in China. As a **cultural outsider**, he records folk activities such as spring cleaning, pasting "Fu" characters, setting off fireworks, and the New Year's Eve dinner from an observer's standpoint. His attention focuses on festive forms and entertainment, representing foreign students' intuitive perception of the Spring Festival. The second narrator, Xu Gang, is an engineer who has returned to his hometown for work. As a **cultural returnee**, he defines the Spring Festival as "family reunion"; the core meaning of the festival lies in returning to one's roots and accompanying family members, reflecting contemporary young people's adherence to the emotional essence of traditional festivals. The third narrator, Li Yan, is a retired elderly woman. As a **cultural inheritor**, she focuses on family gatherings, making dumplings, and other intergenerationally transmitted family customs, highlighting the value of the Spring Festival's intergenerational continuity. These three perspectives complement each other, not only presenting rich folk customs and cultural products of the Spring Festival, but also visually demonstrating the cognitive differences between Chinese and foreign groups, and between different generations, toward the same festival. This provides authentic material for intercultural comparative inquiry.

From the purpose dimension (Why): The text does not simply list festival customs; rather, it conveys three major values through different individuals' experiences: first, *family-centeredness* – taking family reunion as the core spirit of the Spring Festival; second, *cultural inheritance* – affirming the national memory carried by traditional folk customs; and third, *cultural resonance* – allowing Chinese and foreign readers to perceive the universal human emotional pursuit of "reunion" through festival experiences. This purpose lays a foundation for guiding students to establish correct cultural views and engage in cultural critical thinking.

From the discourse features dimension (How): The text adopts a magazine column format, with an editor's introduction leading to the main content, and character portraits dividing sections. The language style varies with the narrator's identity: Tom's account uses more objective descriptions and passive voice, reflecting an outsider learner's observational perspective; Xu Gang and Li Yan's texts employ rich descriptive details and subjective emotional expressions, full of familial warmth. These differentiated linguistic expressions and stylistic features allow students, while learning the language, to further understand the connection between language and cultural thinking.

2.2. Expanding Intercultural Perspectives with Supplementary Materials

Relying solely on the textbook text would limit students' inquiry to "differences

between Chinese and foreign festival perceptions." To advance cultural teaching from "difference comparison" to "cultural dissemination," this lesson introduces the CGTN English news report on the Spring Festival's UNESCO intangible cultural heritage application as supplementary material. This authentic foreign-media discourse focuses on the Spring Festival's journey from a traditional Chinese festival to global recognition and successful UNESCO inscription, creating an authentic international communication context.

The supplementary material has two pedagogical values: first, it breaks students' fixed notion that "culture only exists locally," prompting them to reflect on the pathways and significance of local traditional culture going global; second, it upgrades the inquiry topic from "how Chinese and foreign cultures differ" to "how local culture can reach the world," pushing students to step beyond simple comparative thinking and examine the global value of traditional Chinese culture from a worldwide perspective, thereby achieving a deeper expansion of intercultural cognition.

3. Positioning Teaching Objectives in Layers Based on the Intercultural Competence Framework

"Cultural awareness refers to the understanding of Chinese and foreign cultures and the identification with excellent cultures; it is the intercultural cognition, attitudes, and behavioral dispositions demonstrated by students in a globalized context" (Ministry of Education, 2020:4). This study is guided by the *Reference Framework for Intercultural Competence Teaching in Foreign Language Education in China* (Shanghai International Studies University, 2023:8), which divides intercultural competence into three core dimensions: **cognitive understanding**, **affective attitudes**, and **behavioral skills**. This framework provides clear theoretical guidance for setting teaching objectives and designing instructional activities in this lesson.

3.1. Core Connotations and Pedagogical Implications of the Intercultural Competence Framework

The three dimensions are complementary and progressive:

- **Cognitive Understanding Dimension:** encompasses knowledge of Chinese and foreign cultures and general cultural knowledge. It requires students to identify cultural products and practices, and to distinguish between different groups' cultural ways of thinking.
- **Affective Attitudes Dimension:** includes cultural awareness, national identity, and global vision. It guides students to correctly view cultural differences, build cultural confidence, and establish connections between "self and others, self and nation, self and the world."
- **Behavioral Skills Dimension:** focuses on intercultural experiencing,

intercultural dialogue, and intercultural exploration. It requires students to use English to accomplish cultural description, exchange opinions, and engage in critical and creative thinking activities.

These three dimensions align well with the pedagogical logic of "language learning, cultural perception, and competency development" in English language teaching, and also match high school students' learning patterns of knowledge input, emotional internalization, and ability output. Therefore, this lesson is fully designed under this framework across all teaching stages.

The following table summarizes the framework's structure and its main components:

Dimension	Sub-components	Key Teaching Implications
Cognitive Understanding	Knowledge of Chinese culture; knowledge of foreign cultures; general cultural knowledge (e.g., cultural products, practices, values, worldviews)	Help students recognize and compare cultural phenomena; understand cultural perspectives behind behaviors
Affective Attitudes	Cultural awareness (openness, curiosity, respect); national identity (pride, commitment); global vision (recognition of interdependence, shared humanity)	Foster empathy, national pride, and willingness to engage with the world; reduce ethnocentrism
Behavioral Skills	Intercultural experiencing (observing, describing); intercultural dialogue (listening, negotiating, mediating); intercultural exploration (reflecting, creating, problem-solving)	Equip students with practical skills to communicate across cultures, resolve misunderstandings, and create culturally sensitive products

Figure 1. Center for Intercultural Studies, Shanghai International Studies University, 2023: 8-10, 18

3.2. Layer-by-Layer Teaching Objectives Based on the Framework

Combining the textbook requirements, student characteristics, and the intercultural competence framework, the teaching objectives of this lesson are classified under the three dimensions to achieve precise layering:

1. Cognitive Understanding Objectives:

① Read and list the three readers' experiences and views of the Spring Festival.

② Interpret the different understandings of the Spring Festival held by the three narrators.

③ Extract key similarities and differences from the three accounts.

2. Affective Attitudes Objectives:

① Distinguish between different cultural understandings of Chinese people and foreigners regarding the Spring Festival.

② Experience the core spirit of "family reunion" through cultural comparison, thereby enhancing cultural identity and national confidence.

③ Expand global perspective and awareness based on the issue of the

globalization of the Spring Festival.

3. Behavioral Skills Objectives:

① Conduct intercultural dialogue through reading, discussion, and interactive polling activities.

② Achieve intercultural exploration and innovation through output tasks, such as writing introductions to the Spring Festival and creating original comics using AI tools.

4. Classroom Practice of Cultivating Intercultural Communicative Competence through Festival Discourse

4.1. Cognitive Construction: Reading for Knowledge and Perceiving Cultural Differences

Cognition is the foundation of intercultural competence. This stage centers on text interpretation and proceeds in three steps — activating prior knowledge, decoding the text, and comparing perspectives — to help students build systematic cultural cognition.

1. **Lead-in: Activating Prior Experience**

   At the start of the class, an AI-generated short video of Spring Festival scenes is played to create an immersive atmosphere with festive settings and folk customs. The teacher poses questions (e.g., "What do you usually do during the Spring Festival? What does this festival mean to you and your family?") to prompt students to recall their own Spring Festival experiences, awaken their existing cultural knowledge, and naturally introduce the topic, stimulating interest in reading and inquiry.

2. **Anticipate and Activate: Text Prediction and Decoding for Cognitive Foundation**

   (Anticipate) Students are guided to observe the textual layout, illustrations, introductory sentences, and other genre features to predict the main content, cultivating reading strategies of observation and logical inference. (Activate) Students complete a live poll via Mentimeter to visually present the class's initial understanding of Spring Festival customs and connotations. The poll is not about right or wrong; its core purpose is to gauge student baseline and reveal their original cultural perceptions, laying good groundwork for subsequent text interpretation, cultural comparison, and emotional appreciation.

3. **Acquire: Close Reading and Organizing to Perceive Cultural Differences**

   After pre-reading preparation, the class enters the Acquire phase, using jigsaw reading in groups. Students are divided into three groups to study the accounts of Tom, Xu Gang, and Li Yan respectively, using guided worksheets to sort out each narrator's experiences, views, and understanding. After completing information organization, groups share their findings, and the teacher guides

students to summarize similarities and differences among the three perspectives, thereby fostering teamwork and initial awareness of different cultural identities between Chinese and foreign individuals.

4.2. Affective Cultivation: Reading with Reflection and Shaping National Pride

On the basis of fully perceiving cultural differences, the class moves to the affective internalization stage, cultivating cultural empathy, national identity, and global perspective through value identification and topic expansion.

1. **Value Identification and Strengthening Cultural Identity**
   (Analyze) Using Mentimeter again, the teacher presents poll results from overseas students on the "core elements of Spring Festival" (which focus on "having fun"). Comparing these with the class's own poll results reveals a clear difference: Chinese students generally regard "family reunion" as the core, while foreign students pay more attention to festive entertainment. The teacher uses this as a starting point to guide students to look beyond cultural phenomena and explore "family-centeredness" as a core trait of traditional Chinese culture, clarifying the essence of cultural differences and advancing from "cultural phenomenon cognition" to "cultural mindset interpretation."
2. **Topic Expansion: Cultivating Global Perspective and Global Competence**
   (Advance) After analyzing cultural differences, the teacher raises the core issue: Given the differences in cultural understanding, why has the Spring Festival evolved from a local tradition into a global cultural phenomenon? The teacher introduces the CGTN English news material on the Spring Festival's UNESCO intangible cultural heritage application, and organizes group discussions. Students analyze the reasons from perspectives such as the charm of the culture itself, overseas Chinese dissemination, globalized new media communication, and shared human emotions. In the discussion, students recognize the worldwide influence of excellent traditional Chinese culture and develop the cognition of "connecting local culture with the world," fostering a global perspective. The teacher further points out that global competence not only requires understanding diverse cultures but also emphasizes the ability to analyze cultural interactions, respect differences, and assume shared responsibilities when facing global issues — this is the key juncture where this lesson moves from cultural cognition to global competence.

4.3. Skill Enhancement: Reading Practice and Refining Intercultural Communication Skills

1. **Intercultural Dialogue: Exchanging Views in Interaction**
   Through Mentimeter live polls, peer evaluations, and Socratic questioning between teacher and students, an authentic intercultural communication

context is created. Information gaps are set in class to encourage students to express personal opinions, listen to others, and negotiate different viewpoints, simulating the processes of listening, expressing, and communicating in intercultural encounters, thereby exercising oral interaction and opinion exchange skills (integrated throughout the lesson).

2. **Intercultural Exploration: Innovative Expression in Output**
   Layered after-class assignments are designed to accommodate students at different levels, enabling intercultural critical thinking and creativity. The compulsory task requires students to introduce the Spring Festival to foreign friends in English, summarizing festival activities, cultural connotations, and spiritual core, thus integrating and interpreting intercultural information. The optional task invites students to use AI image-generation tools to create original comics that visually symbolize the cultural spirit of the Spring Festival, transforming cultural understanding into creative works and achieving intercultural critical thinking and innovation. Both tasks require students to act as "cultural disseminators," which embodies "taking responsible action" as a key component of global competence.

4.4. Diversified Integrated Evaluation for Teaching-Assessment Integration

This lesson adheres to the philosophy of integrating teaching, learning, and assessment, building an evaluation system with multiple subjects, varied methods, and focused content, enabling assessment to run through the entire class and achieve a closed loop of "evaluation — feedback — instructional adjustment."

3. Multiple evaluation subjects: Teacher evaluation, peer evaluation, and self-evaluation are combined. The teacher observes students' performance throughout and comments on group work; groups assess each other's quality of information organization and expression; students use self-reflection forms to review their own learning gains.
4. Varied evaluation methods: Both formative and summative assessments are employed, using classroom questioning, on-site observation, learning worksheets, live poll analysis, Socratic questioning, and pre-/post-lesson objective checklists to capture students' learning status comprehensively.
5. Focused evaluation content: Based on the intercultural competence framework, a simplified self-assessment form is designed, prompting students to reflect on their achievements and shortcomings in the three dimensions of cognitive understanding, affective attitudes, and behavioral skills, thus genuinely promoting learning through assessment.

5. Conclusion

This paper, grounded in the three-dimensional framework of intercultural

competence and using the Spring Festival reading lesson from the Beijing Normal University high school English textbook as a practical vehicle, explores a systematic cultivation pathway for intercultural communicative competence through festival discourse. It sets layered teaching objectives based on the theoretical framework to clarify the direction of competence development; guides students in class from interpreting "cultural differences between China and other countries" to gradually delving into the contemporary issue of "local traditions going global." This enables students to appreciate the world influence of excellent traditional Chinese culture while learning to view diverse cultures from a global perspective, establishing a positive connection between "self and the world," and achieving simultaneous development in knowledge, emotion, and ability. Most importantly, this design integrates the core elements of global competence — cultural understanding, perspective-taking, shared responsibility, and proactive action — into each teaching segment, so that intercultural competence cultivation ultimately points toward students becoming new-era talents with both patriotic sentiment and global competence.

Meanwhile, this teaching practice has certain limitations: the application of AI teaching tools still faces technical adaptability issues, and attention to students' diversity of thinking needs to be strengthened. In future teaching, teachers should further explore ways to integrate technology with the classroom, design more open-ended inquiry tasks, respect students' personalized cultural interpretations, and refine the educational model of intercultural teaching through festival discourses, helping students become new-era talents who possess both national pride and a global vision.

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