

Research on College Students' Competence of "Telling Chinese Stories Well" from the Perspective of International Communication in an Agricultural University

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Abstract

The concept of "telling Chinese stories well" has emerged as a significant and prominent issue in recent times. Grounded in the theory of international communication, this thesis undertakes an in-depth analysis of the current state and influencing factors of college students' competence to "tell Chinese stories well". Subsequently, it proposes a set of countermeasures and recommendations. The research is primarily centered around the aspects of cultural literacy, English language competence, and intercultural critical thinking skills. Data collection was achieved through the utilization of questionnaires and interviews. The findings of this thesis indicate that the overall competence of college students to "tell Chinese stories well" in English is at a moderate level. Based on these results, it is suggested that English instructors should implement relevant measures to enhance students' proficiency in this regard.

Keywords

"Telling Chinese Stories Well", International Communication, College English

1. Introduction

In the present era, when college students are tasked with introducing Chinese culture to foreigners in English, their descriptions often lack depth and sophistication, signifying that there is considerable room for improvement in their capacity to express Chinese stories in the English language.

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Consequently, the primary objective of this research is to assess the students' proficiency in expressing Chinese stories in English, focusing on their cultural literacy, language competence and critical thinking skills, to probe into the factors that impede or enhance this competence, and to solicit teachers' perspectives and suggestions for cultivating this competence within the framework of international communication theory. This study is designed to contribute to the enrichment of research on the "telling Chinese stories well" competence within the context of college English courses and to augment the theoretical research framework pertaining to this concept.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Concept of International Communication

International communication refers to the dissemination and exchange of international information that transcends national boundaries via mass media. It encompasses two main components: inbound communication and outbound communication. The "Guide for College English Teaching (2020 Edition)" points out that the cross-cultural communication skills, national consciousness, and international perspective of college students are not only essential competencies and qualities for effective international communication but also constitute a crucial objective of college English teaching in the new era. Hence, the college English class serves as a vital platform for fostering international communication capabilities.

2.2. Definition of "Competence of Telling Chinese Stories Well"

Regarding the concept of "Chinese story", scholars hold diverse viewpoints. [Li \(2014\)](#) believed that Chinese stories encapsulate the shared experiences and emotions of the Chinese people, mirroring the national character, destiny, and aspirations. [Ding \(2017\)](#) defined Chinese stories as "literary works that authentically depict China's history and reality, objectively confront the major contradictions and issues within Chinese society, accurately reflect the lives and aspirations of the Chinese people, comprehensively showcase the material and spiritual essence of the Chinese people, and present China's development and progress from a holistic, broad, and multi-faceted perspective". According to [Yi and Qi \(2022\)](#), the "competence of telling Chinese stories well" can be defined as the language knowledge required to express Chinese stories that integrate traditional, modern, and global aspects of China in a foreign language, the intercultural communication skills to adapt to diverse audiences, and the value system that combines patriotism with an international outlook.

In general, the competence elements for "telling Chinese stories well" necessitate a certain level of cultural literacy, English language competence, critical thinking competence, cross-cultural communication skills, and awareness. To effectively tell a Chinese story, one must first understand the "Chinese story" and the constituent elements of college students' competence in this regard.

2.3. Previous Studies on “Competence of Telling Chinese Stories Well”

With the rapid expansion of China’s economy and the continuous elevation of its international influence, it is an important task to strengthen the construction of spiritual civilization and improve our cultural strength. A series of national conditions and world conditions jointly promoted the birth of the idea of “telling Chinese stories well”. “Tell Chinese stories well and spread Chinese voices” is an important exposition first put forward by President Xi Jinping at the 2013 National Conference on Propaganda and Ideological Work. The background of the times encourages us to “telling Chinese stories well” to the world.

During 1998-1999, there was research on “telling Chinese stories well”, which focused on telling national stories well. By 2004, Davidson (2004)’s research in this field focused on storytelling teaching methods. In recent years, the research on “telling Chinese stories well” has been prolific. Chu (2015) emphasized that “telling Chinese stories well” should be accomplished through “international means” in both language and approach, with directness, concreteness, and equality. Clark (2016) conducted an in-depth exploration of the unique historical and cultural characteristics of the Chinese discourse system and contended that Chinese discourse is applicable to any “non-Western” region. Liu (2018) analyzed stories about China in the *New York Times* and deliberated on how to influence the target audience using specific discourse patterns or strategies.

Overall, the research on “telling Chinese stories well” has been on the rise year by year, with a diverse range of research topics. However, previous studies on Chinese stories were mainly confined to the field of journalism and communication. There has been a paucity of research from the perspective of international communication, and insufficient attention has been accorded to college English courses. The scope and subject matter of research on “telling Chinese stories well” in English have been relatively restricted.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Questions

Based on the purpose and significance of the research, the main research questions are as follows:

Question 1: What is the status quo of the college students’ competence of “telling Chinese stories well”?

Question 2: What are the factors affecting the college students’ competence of “telling Chinese stories well”?

Question 3: What are the implications for college students’ competence of “telling Chinese stories well”?

3.2. Research Subjects

For the convenience of the researcher, a total of 58 senior college students participated in the questionnaire. Questionnaires were distributed online through social

platforms. As senior students, they have accumulated more knowledge and experience, which is more conducive to the research. The subjects of the interview were teachers who taught college English courses, and a total of four teachers were interviewed.

3.3. Research Instruments

(1) Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to investigate the status quo of the college students' competence of "telling Chinese stories well". There are 24 multiple choice questions in the questionnaire, including 20 single choice questions and 4 multiple choice questions.

The content of the questionnaire mainly investigates the college students' competence of "telling Chinese stories well" in English from three aspects: cultural literacy, English language competence and critical thinking competence. There are eight questions for each aspect. The layout of the questionnaire is shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Layout of the questionnaire.

Basic Information	Literacy	Language Competence	Critical Thinking
Item1	Item2-9	Item 10 - 17	Item 18 - 25

(2) Interview

The objective of conducting the interview was to gain insights into teachers' instructional design strategies, viewpoints, and recommendations regarding the concept of "telling Chinese stories well". The interview content was meticulously crafted, taking into account the three crucial dimensions of cultural literacy, language competence, and critical thinking competence.

The researcher selected four college English instructors to serve as the interviewees. The contact details of these four teachers were acquired through personal connections. Upon obtaining their explicit consent, the researcher engaged in conversations with them via social media platforms and meticulously recorded their responses. The details of the interviewees are presented in **Table 2**. To safeguard their privacy, the author has assigned them pseudonyms as Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, and Teacher D.

Table 2. Background of interviewees.

Participant	Sex	Major
Teacher A	F	English
Teacher B	F	English
Teacher C	F	English
Teacher D	F	English

4. Results and Discussion

This part presents the results and discussions of students' questionnaires and teachers' interviews.

4.1. Results of the Questionnaire

(1) Students' Literacy on "Telling Chinese Stories Well"

Cultural literacy refers to the proficiency in conversing fluently with idioms, metaphors, and informal content from dominant cultures. To excel in "telling Chinese stories well", it is imperative to enhance Chinese cultural literacy. Cultural literacy entails understanding and responding to cultural interactions, encompassing basic cultural knowledge, a sound cultural accomplishment, and an awareness of cultural participation.

Table 3. Students' literacy on "Telling Chinese Stories Well".

Item	A (%)	B (%)	C (%)	D (%)	E (%)
Item2	6.9%	48.28%	5.17%	37.93%	1.72%
Item3	13.79%	44.83%	6.9%	32.76%	1.72%
Item4	1.72%	29.31%	6.9%	55.17%	6.9%
Item5	1.72%	48.28%	1.72%	44.83%	3.45%
Item6	81.03%	29.31%	34.48%	20.69%	77.59%
Item7	48.28%	3.45%	5.17%	20.69%	22.41%
Item8	98.28%	1.72%	0%	0%	0%
Item9	91.83%	91.38%	81.03%	84.48%	0%

From **Table 3**, it is evident that approximately half of the participants possess a reasonably good cultural background, but there is still some room for further enhancement. The data also reveals that students' interest in outstanding traditional culture remains inadequate, and there exists an unbalanced development in their cultural knowledge. Notably, 48.28% of the students demonstrated a better understanding of ancient traditional historical and cultural stories, indicating a stronger inclination towards ancient traditional history and culture, which attests to the profound influence of traditional culture. Moreover, 91.38% of the students expressed a greater willingness to augment their cultural literacy and enhance their competence to tell Chinese stories well through reading books and watching movies (Item 9).

Based on the survey findings, the author ascertained that the majority of college students are inclined to improve their cultural literacy, thereby enhancing their competence in "telling Chinese stories well". The creation of a favorable atmosphere and the reinforcement of ideological and moral construction are also conducive to the elevation of cultural literacy and the improvement of storytelling abilities. In addition to acquiring relevant subject knowledge, students should place emphasis on learning Chinese cultural knowledge and continuously augment their cultural literacy to refine their capacity for "telling Chinese stories well".

(2) Students' English Language Competence on "Telling Chinese Stories Well"

According to Wen (2015), "English language competence" is founded on the language expression competence of the mother tongue. In the process of English learning, English knowledge and the language skills of "speaking" and "writing" are acquired through conceptualized thinking activities. Subsequently, semantic expression content is organized and arranged through thinking activities, gradually fostering the competence to express in English. To effectively "tell Chinese stories well", it is essential to enhance English language competence.

Table 4. Students' English language competence on "Telling Chinese Stories Well".

Item	A (%)	B (%)	C (%)	D (%)	E (%)
Item10	10.34%	10.34%	44.83%	27.59%	6.9%
Item11	8.62%	12.07%	32.76%	34.48%	12.07%
Item12	6.9%	18.97%	37.93%	24.14%	12.07%
Item13	8.62%	22.41%	43.1%	22.41%	3.45%
Item14	8.62%	18.91%	22.41%	37.93%	12.07%
Item15	0%	5.17%	18.97%	51.72%	24.14%
Item16	93.1%	6.9%	0%	0%	0%
Item17	87.93%	91.38%	91.38%	86.21%	0%

From Table 4, it can be observed that 44.83% of college students were uncertain about their competence to express their Chinese stories in English in real-life situations, and 10.34% of the students strongly disagreed with their capacity to do so. Merely 6.9% strongly agreed that they could express their life stories in English (Item 10). This indicates a lack of confidence in their English language expression competence and further suggests a relatively weak foundation in this regard.

The data also indicates that 51.72% of the students agreed with the statement "I hope I can express the Chinese stories I know in English" (Item 15), signifying their willingness to tell Chinese stories well in English. Additionally, 93.1% of the students believed that English expression competence had an impact on "telling Chinese stories well" (Item 16), and 91.38% of the students held the view that they should enhance their English expression competence and improve their storytelling skills by watching relevant foreign language films and strengthening oral English practice (Item 17). Furthermore, the accumulation of relevant vocabulary related to "Chinese stories" and the creation of a language environment are also beneficial for enhancing the competence in "telling Chinese stories well".

In light of this, the author contends that English language competence is one of the factors influencing college students' competence to "tell Chinese stories well". The overall competence of college students in "telling Chinese stories well" in English is moderate and requires further reinforcement. To enhance this competence, the author believes that appropriate measures must be implemented to improve students' English expression skills.

(3) Students' Intercultural Critical Thinking on "Telling Chinese Stories Well"

Critical thinking refers to students' competence to objectively analyze problems, make accurate inferences, innovate, and objectively evaluate. Intercultural critical thinking pertains to an individual's capacity to analyze, interpret, and judge foreign cultures and effectively express local cultures.

Table 5. Students' intercultural critical thinking on "Telling Chinese Stories Well".

Item	A (%)	B (%)	C (%)	D (%)	E (%)
Item18	25.86%	44.83%	15.52%	12.07%	1.72%
Item19	91.38%	6.9%	1.72%	0%	0%
Item20	1.72%	5.17%	17.24%	56.9%	18.97%
Item21	1.72%	0%	15.52%	58.62%	24.14%
Item22	93.1%	1.72%	5.17%	0%	0%
Item23	6.9%	17.24%	36.21%	39.66%	0%
Item24	96.55%	3.45%	0%	0%	0%
Item25	87.93%	93.1%	84.48%	75.86%	0%

As shown in **Table 5**, it was discovered that 96.55% of the students believed that cross-cultural critical thinking skills had an impact on "telling Chinese stories well" (Item 24). In this regard, the author is convinced that intercultural critical thinking competence is also a factor influencing college students' competence in "telling Chinese stories well". Therefore, to enhance this competence, attention should be paid to the cultivation of students' cross-cultural critical thinking skills. Given the cultural differences between Eastern and Western countries, to tell Chinese stories well, it is necessary to focus on cultivating students' cross-cultural critical thinking competence while respecting cultural disparities.

Regarding how to improve cross-cultural critical thinking and tell Chinese stories well (Item 25), 93.1% of the students thought that teachers should guide students to learn and reflect independently, and 87.93% believed that schools should strengthen the cultivation of cross-cultural thinking competence. Simultaneously, students should actively participate in relevant thematic activities, and teachers should enhance the integration of cross-cultural thinking and the task-based teaching mode.

Through the survey results, it was found that students' cross-cultural critical thinking competence is relatively favorable. The majority of students are capable of objectively analyzing, judging, and evaluating different cultures and can view cultural differences dialectically. However, further strengthening of this competence is still necessary.

4.2. Results of the Interview

(1) Teachers' Literacy on "Telling Chinese Stories Well"

Teachers are not only researchers in education and teaching but also disseminators of knowledge. They play a pivotal role in enhancing students' competence in "telling Chinese stories well". A solid theoretical foundation and professional cultural literacy are prerequisites for effectively teaching Chinese stories in college

English courses.

Table 6. Teachers' literacy on "Telling Chinese Stories Well".

	Do you think teachers' cultural literacy has an impact on telling Chinese stories well? If so, can you give an example?
Teacher A	Yes, If the teacher knows some Chinese history, he or she can tell some historical stories, so that students can understand more easily. Teachers with profound cultural literacy can explain more thoroughly.
Teacher B	I think it has an impact, because teachers with high cultural literacy can tell Chinese stories more accurately and truthfully.
Teacher C	If teachers master some historical knowledge and know some idioms and allusions, they can better enable students to understand Chinese stories. Teachers with profound literary can tell Chinese stories with cultural connotations.
Teacher D	Only profound cultural literacy can handle the details of Chinese stories well, such as the role of classical poetry. Having profound cultural literacy helps students to speak deeply and thoroughly about Chinese culture.

As can be seen from **Table 6**, the teachers expressed that if they possess a high level of cultural literacy, their competence to tell Chinese stories well will be more accurate, authentic, and comprehensive. Knowledge of idioms and allusions can assist students in better understanding Chinese stories, and teachers with profound literary skills can tell stories with rich cultural connotations. Those with high cultural literacy can handle the details of Chinese stories, such as the role of classical poetry.

Consequently, the author believes that to improve students' competence in "telling Chinese stories well", teachers should continuously enhance their own cultural literacy and strengthen their knowledge reserves. Telling Chinese stories well in college English class is not an easy feat. It not only requires the imparting of English knowledge but also the skillful integration of "Chinese stories" content. Only by constantly enriching their knowledge can teachers improve their cultural literacy and effectively apply the content of "Chinese stories" in the class. The enhancement of cultural literacy is of great significance for English teachers to "tell Chinese stories well", as it facilitates better storytelling to students, enabling them to learn more about the English expression of "Chinese stories" and improving their English competence in this regard.

(2) Teachers' Suggestion on "Telling Chinese Stories Well"

From the interviews, four suggestions regarding "Telling Chinese Stories Well" emerged. Firstly, to improve students' English expression competence, students can read more English newspapers and magazines related to Chinese culture. Secondly, in terms of cultivating students' cross-cultural critical thinking competence, students need to understand the characteristics and connotations of different cultures, conduct cultural comparisons, and grasp the essence of culture to identify the key points. Thirdly, teachers should intensify their efforts to promote Chinese stories and culture in class, enabling students to gain a better understanding of China through various channels. Fourthly, teachers should continuously

improve their own cultural literacy, flexibly adjust the content of textbooks, and effectively integrate Chinese cultural elements into English teaching.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Findings and Implications of the Study

Through this research, it was determined that the college students' competence in "telling Chinese stories well" is moderate and requires improvement. Moreover, students themselves are willing to tell Chinese stories and disseminate Chinese culture, but they lack confidence in doing so with foreigners due to the need to enhance their cultural literacy, English language competence, and cross-cultural critical thinking competence. Additionally, teachers recommended improving their own cultural literacy to tell Chinese stories more accurately.

Based on the findings of this study, several useful implications can be derived to assist college students in enhancing their competence in "telling Chinese stories well". Firstly, it is essential for college students to possess the competence to "tell Chinese stories well" in English, as they bear the responsibility of spreading Chinese culture. They should not only excel in their major studies but also actively seek ways to improve their storytelling skills in English. Secondly, to skillfully incorporate Chinese stories into English classes, teachers should have a comprehensive understanding of the textbooks to better design the teaching of "Chinese stories". At the same time, teachers should encourage students to "tell Chinese stories well" in English. Schools should also organize relevant activities or offer elective courses to support the cultivation of this competence.

5.2. Limitations of the Study

This study has certain limitations. The questionnaire was administered to only 58 students, and only 4 teachers were interviewed. The sample size in this study is relatively small, resulting in relatively limited data analysis, which may not represent the overall situation of all students.

5.3. Expectations for Further Study

Future studies could collect a larger sample of data and expand the research population to include students from diverse backgrounds. Additionally, future research could compare and analyze the competence of students from different types of schools in "telling Chinese stories well".

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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