

Reform of College English Teaching Based on Xiuyan Manchu Paper Cutting: A Practical Path from the Perspective of Cultural Inheritance

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ABSTRACT

Under the context of the national strategy to build a culturally strong country and the development of higher education, college English teaching not only bears the mission of cultivating language proficiency but also shoulders the contemporary responsibility of inheriting and disseminating China's excellent traditional culture. As a national intangible cultural heritage, Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting embodies rich historical memory, folk customs, and aesthetic wisdom, providing unique local cultural resources for college English teaching reform. This paper examines the cultural connotations and pedagogical value of Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting from the perspective of cultural inheritance, explores practical approaches for integrating it into college English education, and proposes a "culture-language" dual-driven integrated teaching model. By using innovative teaching methods, activity design, and improved teaching support systems, this approach aims to break the traditional dilemma between language and culture in English instruction. It seeks to achieve the following objectives: enhancing students' comprehensive English application skills while preserving Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting culture, thereby offering new perspectives for college English teaching reform and the dynamic inheritance of regional intangible cultural heritage.

Keywords: *Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting, English teaching reform in colleges and universities, Cultural inheritance, Practical approaches, Intangible cultural heritage.*

1. INTRODUCTION

With the acceleration of globalization, cross-cultural communication has become increasingly frequent. As an important avenue for cultivating international talents, English teaching in colleges faces new challenges and opportunities in terms of its content and teaching models. For a long time, English teaching in Chinese universities has primarily focused on Western culture, with insufficient integration of local culture. This has led to students frequently experiencing "China cultural aphasia" in cross-cultural communication, making it difficult for them to accurately express China's excellent traditional culture in English, let alone effectively assume the role of cultural communicators. Meanwhile, intangible cultural heritage represented by Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting faces issues such as transmission gaps and limited dissemination scope during modernization,

also requiring educational platforms to achieve living inheritance.

Originating from the Xiuyan region of Liaodong, Manchu paper-cutting is an artistic form developed by the Manchu people through centuries of cultural practice. Its themes encompass Manchu mythology, hunting traditions, festive celebrations, and life events like weddings and funerals. Featuring simple yet vivid designs with bold colors, these artworks serve not only as visual representations of Manchu culture but also as carriers of collective memory and cultural identity. Integrating Xiuyan paper-cutting into college English education transcends mere cultural element incorporation. Through deep cultural-linguistic integration, students will learn to understand local traditions while enhancing their language competence, creating a virtuous cycle that "culture promotes language, and language spreads culture."

This pedagogical innovation aligns with the Ministry of Education's directive to "incorporate China's outstanding traditional culture into curriculum systems," while pioneering new pathways for intangible cultural heritage preservation. It holds significant theoretical and practical value in bridging cultural traditions with modern education.

2. CULTURAL CONNOTATION AND TEACHING VALUE OF XIUYAN MANCHU PAPER CUTTING

2.1 The Cultural Connotation of Xiuyan Manchu Paper Cutting

The cultural essence of Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting manifests in three dimensions: First, as a repository of historical memory, it has patterns like "archery and horseback riding" and "shamanic dances" vividly recreate the hunting traditions and shamanistic beliefs of Manchu ancestors, serving as living fossils for studying the ethnic group's historical development. For instance, the "deer bearing lingzhi" motif originates from Manchu totem worship, symbolizing auspiciousness and bountiful harvests while reflecting their reverence for nature and aspirations for prosperity. Second, as a crystallization of folk culture, these paper-cuts play essential decorative and ceremonial roles during major festivals like Spring Festival, Lantern Festival, and weddings. During Lunar New Year celebrations, symmetrical "Fu" character cuttings featuring distinctive Manchu "swastika patterns" symbolize family reunion and fulfillment. Wedding traditions are embodied through "happiness curtain" designs and "dragon-phoenix auspiciousness" paper-cuts that capture Manchu marriage customs and ethical values. Third, as a testament to aesthetic ingenuity, it employs techniques like "folded cutting" and "punched cutting," Xiuyan paper-cutting emphasizes fluid lines and symbolic patterns. Its preference for vibrant red, yellow, and blue hues creates an artistic style that combines rustic simplicity with intricate craftsmanship, showing people's unique aesthetic sensibilities and creative vision.

2.2 The Educational Value of Xiuyan Manchu Paper Cutting

2.2.1 Enriching the Content of English Teaching to Solve the Dilemma of "Cultural Aphasia"

Traditional English teaching in universities predominantly focuses on Western literature, history, and society, leaving students with insufficient English expressions for local culture. As an intangible cultural carrier, Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting can be transformed into rich teaching materials — from the historical origins and production techniques of paper-cutting to its symbolic patterns and folkloric connections, all these elements can serve as themes for vocabulary accumulation, sentence pattern practice, and essay writing. For instance, when explaining topics related to "traditional crafts," teachers can lead students to describe the steps of "fold-cutting" and "hollow-cutting" in English, or write short essays introducing the cultural symbolism of the "Deer Carrying Lingzhi" paper-cutting. This enables students to grasp English expressions for local culture through language practice, effectively addressing the phenomenon of "China cultural aphasia."

2.2.2 Stimulating the Interest in English Learning and Enhancing the Initiative of Learning

Interest is a vital driving force in language learning. Compared with abstract linguistic knowledge, Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting demonstrates intuitiveness, fun, and interactivity, effectively sparking students' enthusiasm. In English classes, learners can actively engage in paper-cutting artworks, participating in basic cutting activities, and discussing folk stories behind the art. For instance, during the "Festival Culture" unit, teachers might showcase the "lantern flower paper-cuts" from the Yuanxiao Festival of the Xiuyan Manchu ethnic group. Students could then discuss the connection between paper-cutting and festival customs in English groups, or simulate being "paper-cutting culture interpreters" to introduce artworks to peers. This "learning by doing, learning by using" approach helps students appreciate the practicality and enjoyment of English learning, transforming passive absorption into active exploration.

2.2.3 *Cultivating Cross-cultural Communication Skills and Enhancing Cultural Confidence*

The essence of cross-cultural communication lies in “understanding differences, respecting diversity, and effective expression.” Integrating Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting into college English education not only deepens students’ understanding of local culture but also guides them to view cultural disparities between China and the West through comparative perspectives. For instance, when studying the “folk art” theme, teachers can compare the artistic styles and cultural backgrounds of Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting with Mexico's “Papel Picado” (painted paper) tradition. This approach encourages students to analyze similarities and differences in English while exploring how different cultures uniquely interpret the art form of paper-cutting. Through such comparative study, students can enhance their cross-cultural awareness and strengthen cultural confidence by appreciating the distinctive value of their own heritage, thereby laying a solid foundation for future global communication.

3. THE DIFFICULTIES OF INTEGRATING XIUYAN MANCHU PAPER CUTTING INTO COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING

3.1 *Current Situation Analysis*

Currently, some universities have begun to integrate China's outstanding traditional culture into English teaching, but practices focusing on local intangible cultural heritage like Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting remain insufficient. On one hand, teaching materials predominantly rely on image displays and textual introductions, lacking in-depth exploration of the cultural essence of paper-cutting. Students can only grasp its surface characteristics while struggling to comprehend the historical and folkloric values behind them. On the other hand, lesson designs are monotonous, mostly following the traditional “teacher lectures + student reading” model that lacks interactivity and practical engagement. This results in low class participation, making it difficult to effectively combine paper-cutting culture with the actual language application.

From the perspective of educators, English teachers generally possess solid language teaching capabilities. However, they often lack sufficient understanding of Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting

culture knowledge and are struggle to design effective teaching activities which can organically integrate cultural elements with language instruction. Most instructors have not received training in intangible cultural heritage (ICH) studies, resulting in limited knowledge about the historical background, craftsmanship techniques, and cultural symbolism of paper-cutting. Consequently, they find it challenging to accurately and vividly interpret this cultural heritage in their teaching, let alone create integrated educational activities tailored to students' cognitive development.

From the students’ perspective, most of them lack sufficient cultural awareness of Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting and show little interest in cultural identification with this local intangible heritage. While some students exhibit curiosity about the art form, they frequently struggle with English expression — either being hesitant to speak up or lacking the confidence to articulate their thoughts. This challenge becomes particularly evident when encountering specialized terms like “shaman totem” and “swastika pattern,” where students often find it difficult to use precise English equivalents, ultimately resulting in insufficient motivation and capability for cultural dissemination.

3.2 *Core Dilemmas*

3.2.1 *The Dilemma of Balancing Language Goals and Cultural Goals*

The core objective of English teaching in higher education institutions is to enhance students’ language application skills, while cultural heritage preservation serves as an additional goal. These two objectives often conflict in terms of instructional time allocation and resource distribution. Overemphasizing paper-cutting culture explanations may dilute language knowledge instruction, deviating from the essence of English education. On the contrary, treating paper-cutting merely as a decorative element in language teaching risks failing to achieve cultural inheritance goals, leading to superficial integration for integration’s sake. The critical challenge lies in how to develop both language proficiency and cultural preservation within limited class hours—a pressing issue requiring urgent resolution.

3.2.2 *The Dilemma of the Lack of Interdisciplinary Teaching Ability*

Integrating Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting into university English education requires teachers to possess both English language teaching skills and Manchu cultural research capabilities, representing a typical interdisciplinary teaching model. However, current teacher training systems in higher education predominantly focus on enhancing single-discipline competencies. English instructors lack cultural research abilities and methodologies, while cultural scholars also lack practical experience in language instruction. This situation makes it difficult to form cross-disciplinary teaching teams, resulting in teaching content and methods that lack professional rigor and systematic design.

3.2.3 *The Dilemma of Stimulating Students' Cultural Identity and Willingness to Participate*

In the context of globalization and digital transformation, students are exposed to increasingly diverse cultural forms while showing diminishing interest in traditional local culture. Many perceive Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting as “outdated”, lacking both academic appeal and cultural resonance. The complexity of English expression also discourages some learners from actively participating in integrated teaching initiatives. How to ignite students’ passion for Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting culture, and to enhance their cultural identity, and to boost engagement willingness has become a critical challenge in ensuring effective educational reform outcomes.

4. PRACTICAL PATH OF INTEGRATING XIUYAN MANCHU PAPER CUTTING INTO COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING

4.1 *Building a Teaching Model of "Culture and Language" Dual Drive Integration*

To solve the dilemma of balancing "language objectives" and "cultural objectives", it is necessary to build a "culture-language" dual-drive integrated teaching mode. It oriented by cultural inheritance and focusing on language application. This model deeply combine the study of xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting culture with the training of English

language ability, so that realize the coordinated development of both.

4.1.1 *Hierarchical Design of Teaching Objectives*

Based on students’ English proficiency and cultural awareness, teaching objectives can be categorized into three aspects: foundational, intermediate, and advanced. The foundational level focuses on "cultural understanding + vocabulary building," such as introducing common motifs in Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting (e.g., deer, lingzhi mushrooms, shamanism) and teaching related English terms like totem, folk custom, and craftsmanship. The intermediate level emphasizes “cultural comprehension + language application,” including guiding students to describe paper-cutting processes in English or analyze folk symbolism in patterns. The advanced level aims at “cultural dissemination + cross-cultural communication,” requiring students to design promotional materials for paper-cutting culture or organize international exchange activities with foreign students. This approach ensures language development while deepening cultural heritage preservation.

4.1.2 *Modular Integration of Teaching Content*

Focusing on the cultural dimensions of Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting, the teaching content is organized into four modules: “History and Origins”, “Craftsmanship and Techniques”, “Patterns and Symbolism”, and “Folk Customs and Applications”. Each module corresponding to specific themes in English language instruction, achieving precise integration of cultural knowledge and linguistic skills. For example, the “Craftsmanship and Techniques” module connects with the “Process Description” theme in English teaching. By demonstrating folding and peeling techniques, it trains students in using imperative sentences and sequential conjunctions (first, then, finally). The “Patterns and Symbolism” module links to the “Perspective Expression” theme, guiding students to articulate their understanding of patterns like “Deer Carrying Lingzhi” and “Dragon-Phoenix Auspiciousness” in English, thereby enhancing argumentative writing skills. Each module features three phases: “Cultural Input-Language Practice-Practical Application”, ensuring seamless integration between cultural learning and language training.

4.2 Innovative "Contextual-Interaction" Teaching Method

In view of the lack of students' willingness to participate, it is necessary to innovate new teaching methods and stimulate students' interest and initiative through creating real cultural situations and interactive links, so that students can improve their language ability and cultural cognition in the "immersive" situation.

4.2.1 Application of Situational Teaching Method

Teachers can create authentic teaching scenarios related to Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting, enabling students to complete language tasks within these immersive contexts. For example, in the "Paper-cutting Culture Exhibition" scenario, students can do the role-play as tour guides introducing the historical background and cultural symbolism of paper-cutting artworks to visitors in English. In the "Folk Paper-cutting Experience" scenario, they can simulate a Manchu wedding scene, discussing the placement customs and symbolic meanings of "Xizi Lian" paper-cutting in English. During the "Cross-cultural Communication" scenario, students will engage in "paper-cutting art dialogues" with international exchange students, comparing cultural differences between Chinese and Western paper-cutting traditions. These contextual designs help students to appreciate the practicality of English learning while enhancing their proactive application of language skills.

4.2.2 Promotion of Project-Based Learning

Teachers are encouraged to design project-based learning tasks centered on Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting to enhance students' language skills and cultural literacy through teamwork. For example, the "Xiuyan Manchu Paper-Cutting English Brochure Creation" project requires groups to divide responsibilities across four stages: collecting cultural materials (English literature search), writing brochure content (English composition), designing layouts (interdisciplinary collaboration), and presenting outcomes (English report). Another project, "Paper-Cutting Culture Short Video Production," involves students recording tutorials on paper-cutting techniques and folk stories in English, then publishing them on international social media platforms. This project-based approach not only develops students'

comprehensive English skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing but also cultivates teamwork, innovative thinking, and cultural awareness.

4.3 Designing Teaching Activities Combining "Theory and Practice"

In order to deepen students' understanding and application of Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting culture, it is necessary to design teaching activities combining "theoretical learning + practical operation", so that students can learn by doing, so as to realize the transformation from cultural cognition to cultural practice.

4.3.1 Practical Activities in the Classroom

Teachers can integrate paper-cutting activities with language expression in classroom teaching. For example, organizing a "Paper-Cutting Story Chain" activity: Teachers can present a Manchu paper-cutting artwork from Xiuyan (such as "Shaman Prayer"), and students in groups would narrate the mythological story behind it by storytelling in English. Each group would supplement the plot using elements from the paper-cutting design, enhancing students' oral English skills and imagination. Teachers can also conduct a "Paper-Cutting Critique Writing" activity. After observing the artwork, students will write critical essays in English analyzing its artistic style and cultural significance, improving their writing abilities and cultural appreciation abilities. Additionally, it is strongly recommended to invite Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting inheritors into classrooms for bilingual lectures (Chinese narration with English translation), introducing students to the craft and culture. This interactive experience can deepens students' understanding of cultural heritage through a direct engagement with living artisans.

4.3.2 Campus Cultural Activities

Leveraging campus cultural platforms, this study organize English cultural activities related to Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting to foster a vibrant blended learning environment. For instance, hosting the "Xiuyan Manchu Paper-cutting English Culture Festival" featuring segments like an "English Speech Contest" (with the theme "Paper-cutting Culture in My Eyes"), and an "English Interpretation Competition for Paper-cutting Artworks", and "English Short Play Performances" adapted from folk stories in paper-cutting traditions.

Additionally, teachers can establish a “Paper-cutting English Club” that regularly organizes students to engage in paper-cutting workshops, English communication sessions, and cultural research activities. These club-based initiatives enable students to continuously deepen their understanding and practical application of paper-cutting culture through actual participation.

4.3.3 Practical Activities Outside the Campus

In order to expand teaching scenarios, teachers can organize students to engage with society through practical activities promoting Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting in English. For instance, students conduct “cultural research” at Manchu communities in Xiuyan, documenting oral histories of paper-cutting inheritors in English and writing research reports. They also participate in “community English volunteer services,” teaching residents (especially teenagers) about Xiuyan’s cultural heritage and helping them express paper-cutting-related terms in English. Furthermore, through collaborations with local cultural departments, students join “Intangible Cultural Heritage in Scenic Areas” initiatives, explaining paper-cutting culture to international tourists in English, thereby boosting regional cultural tourism development.

4.4 Improving the Teaching Support System of “Teacher-Student-Society” Collaboration

Aiming to solve the problems of interdisciplinary teaching ability deficiency and teaching resource shortage, it is necessary to build a “teacher-learning-society” collaborative teaching support system, integrating multiple resources and providing support for this teaching reform.

4.4.1 Teaching Group Construction

To enhance interdisciplinary capabilities, universities should implement dual training programs for English teachers. Through initiatives like the “Intangible Cultural Heritage Training Workshop” and “Bilingual Education Symposiums”, colleges can invite Manchu culture experts and paper-cutting inheritors to provide specialized instruction, thereby improving educators’ cultural literacy and cross-disciplinary teaching skills. Furthermore, establishing collaborative teams comprising English teachers,

cultural scholars, and paper-cutting artisans with clearly defined roles. English instructors will focus on curriculum design, and cultural scholars would deliver contextual explanations, while heritage bearers can provide paper-cutting guidance. This tripartite collaboration ensures the development of well-structured teaching materials and activity designs that maintain professional rigor and systematic coherence.

4.4.2 Development of Teaching Resources

By integrating resources in universities, local cultural departments, and enterprises, the research team has developed diverse educational materials. For example, through collaboration with Xiuyan County Cultural Center, the research team have compiled historical records, high-resolution images, and videos of heritage bearers related to Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting, converting these into English teaching resources. Additionally, the team developed the “Xiuyan Manchu Paper-cutting English Curriculum” that systematically integrates teaching objectives, content, methodologies, and activity designs, providing standardized instructional references for educators.

4.4.3 Optimization of Evaluation System

Teachers are recommended to establish a dual-dimensional evaluation system integrating “language proficiency + cultural literacy” to transform traditional exam-centered English teaching approaches to process-valued assessments. For language proficiency evaluation, students’ English listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills are comprehensively assessed through classroom performance (e.g., English speeches, group discussions), practical outcomes (e.g., promotional materials, short videos), and final exams. Cultural literacy assessment utilizes cultural cognition tests (e.g., symbolic analysis of paper-cutting patterns), cultural practice reports (e.g., community service summaries), and peer evaluations to assess students’ understanding, appreciation, and dissemination of Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting culture. Evaluation results not only tell course grades but also optimize teaching content and methods, forming a closed cycle of “teaching-evaluation-improvement”.

5. CONCLUSION

Integrating Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting into college English teaching represents an innovative

combination of university English education reform and the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage. This approach not only provides rich local cultural resources for college English instruction and resolves the dilemma of “China's cultural disengagement,” but also paves a new path for the living inheritance of Xiuyan Manchu paper-cutting, achieving a win - win situation between “language teaching” and “cultural inheritance”.

By establishing a dual - driven integration model of “culture - language,” innovating “contextual - interactive” teaching methods, designing “theory - practice” combined teaching activities, and improving a collaborative teaching support system involving “teachers - students - society,” college can effectively address the current challenges in blended teaching—balance, competence, and willingness dilemmas.

This transformation shifts college English education from mere language skill training to “coordinated enhancement of linguistic competence and cultural literacy,” providing a practical paradigm for China's excellent traditional culture in higher education. It also lays a solid foundation for a deep integration of local intangible cultural heritage with foreign language teaching in the future.

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