



COMMENT ON “CONTRAST BETWEEN CHINESE AND WESTERN CULTURAL VALUES AND ITS EFFECTS ON ENGLISH LEARNING IN CHINA”


Rui Gao

School of Foreign Languages, Xinyang University, Xinyang, 464000-China.

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-3744-0604> |  rrg2000@163.com

Commented article: ZHANG, F. H. Contrast Between Chinese and Western Cultural Values and Its Effects on English Learning in China. **Trans/Form/Ação:** revista de filosofia da Unesp, v. 47, n. 4, “Eastern thought”, e0240062, 2024. Available at: <https://revistas.marilia.unesp.br/index.php/transformacao/article/view/14621>.

Received: 11/08/2024 | Approved: 16/08/2024 | Published: 30/09/2024

 <https://doi.org/10.1590/0101-3173.2024.v47.n4.e02400257>



This is an article published in open access under a Creative Commons license.

COMMENT ON “CONTRAST BETWEEN CHINESE AND WESTERN CULTURAL VALUES AND ITS EFFECTS ON ENGLISH LEARNING IN CHINA”

*Rui Gao*¹

Commented article: ZHANG, F. H. Contrast Between Chinese and Western Cultural Values and Its Effects on English Learning in China. **Trans/Form/Ação:** revista de filosofia da Unesp, v. 47, n. 4, “Eastern thought”, e0240062, 2024. Available at: <https://revistas.marilia.unesp.br/index.php/transformacao/article/view/14621>.

The soil from which language springs is its cultural background; language learning cannot be separated from its cultural context. The goal of learning a language is to communicate, not to show off how many language rules one can remember. Daily conversations require information and the ability to express oneself based on meaning. Interpersonal communication does not entirely depend on phonetics, vocabulary, and grammar rules. Simply put, language is a vital tool for communication, learning, and passing down history and culture. However, our current English education seems to have strayed from this purpose. Often, people learn a language for the sake of learning or exams. But learning a language is a continuous process of application; only through extensive practice can one achieve the goals of language learning.

For a long time, how to cultivate and improve students’ English proficiency has been a common concern among experts and teachers. As an international common language, English is a critical subject in many countries, especially in China. However, there are many problems in current English learning. For instance, the English that students learn is not very practical or clear in communication. This is not just a matter of pronunciation or grammar but fundamentally due to cultural differences. Therefore, for an English learner, it is crucial to realize that language is inseparable from its cultural background. To learn a foreign language well, one must understand the people who use that language and their cultural background. Language and culture are interdependent, mutually promoting and influencing. Only with a considerable understanding of culture can one truly appreciate communication contexts,

¹ School of Foreign Languages, Xinyang University, Xinyang, 464000-China. ORCID: 0009-0008-3744-0604. E-mail: rrg2000@163.com.

leading to accurate comprehension and feel of the language, thereby dealing with various linguistic phenomena and achieving smooth communication. Zhang (2024) also recognized the impact of different cultural values between the East and the West on English learning, analyzed these differences in detail, and proposed strategies to address them.

Thus, Chinese people learning English must first recognize the fundamental cultural differences. So, what are the specific differences between Chinese and Western cultures? According to Zhao and Xu in their works, the differences can be summarized as follows (Zhao, 2021; Xu, 2016).

First, Chinese culture is ethical, while Western culture is legal. Chinese culture believes in the inherent goodness of human nature, advocating the establishment of good ethics to regulate behavior and fostering self-discipline through moral education. Although thinkers like Mencius also proposed the idea of inherent evil, it is not mainstream in Chinese culture. Western culture, on the other hand, believes in the inherent evil of human nature, advocating original sin, thus necessitating strict laws to suppress personal desires and instincts, using external regulation to ensure adherence to social norms.

Second, Chinese culture is introverted, while Western culture is extroverted. Chinese culture seeks stability, peace, and balanced social development. Western civilization values change, from which it could seek constant advancement development. Chinese culture is peace-loving and anti-war, considering war an exception and maintaining domestic stability mainly through internal control. Western culture, however, is aggressive and expansionist, ensuring national security through expansion. Heroic narratives are common in Western culture, and heroes often emerge in war. Chinese culture praises humility, while Western culture advocates individuality and confidence.

Third, Chinese culture has a holistic way of thinking, while Western culture emphasizes individualistic thinking. Chinese culture focuses on grasping individuals and observing things holistically, emphasizing the connections between things and viewing humans and nature as a unified whole. For, downside it does not excel in meticulous logical analysis, making it difficult to discover rules or principles in society and nature. In contrast, Western culture is strong in individualistic thinking, adept at understanding the whole from the individual, skilled in precise logical analysis, and able to uncover internal rules and principles, but there is still a certain one-sidedness.

Finally, Chinese culture is family-oriented, while Western culture is individual-oriented. The “family-oriented” approach takes family, clan, and kinship as fundamental orientation units, with relationships characterized by mutual dependence, which is based on blood relations. Everyone is fixed in a web of relationships, with various social needs being met within such family, clan, and kinship groups. This type of cultural psychological orientation is emotion-centered, emphasizing specificity. In contrast, Western society’s

“individual-oriented” culture features self-reliance in interpersonal relationships. Blood ties between close relatives are temporary. Due to lacking permanent family and kinship foundations, individuals’ basic life and environmental orientation are self-reliant. Without the constraints of basic groups like “family” and secondary groups like “kinship,” it is believed that the entire society and the world can be freely utilized, tending to establish universally recognized norms.

Although this is a simple summary of Chinese and Western cultures, it fundamentally illustrates their differences and characteristics. Language, as an important part of culture, is considered the cornerstone of culture. It reflects the characteristics of a nation, containing its historical and cultural background, as well as its lifestyle and way of thinking. Therefore, the cultural differences between China and the West pose barriers to communication, resulting in misunderstandings and unexpected consequences.

Any language is nurtured by culture and continues to develop within its cultural context. For instance, in Chinese, one might say “I am more wronged than Dou E (窦娥),” to describe their grievances, but if foreigners do not understand the origin or story behind this phrase, they cannot comprehend it. Similarly, for Chinese people learning English, when you meet a British person and start talking about topics you are interested in, they may seem excited and surprised, lightly shaking their head, shrugging, and saying “you don’t say.” You might be confused, thinking they are interested but don’t want you to continue talking. Then you switch the topic to something like the Forbidden City. They are still very excited, saying it is a great and magnificent building. But soon after, they say “you don’t say” again. When you can’t help asking why they don’t want you to continue talking, they might laugh and weep all at once, explaining that they express their surprise in this way. It is through a lack of understanding of the relevant cultural context that misunderstandings arise.

Conversely, when you deeply understand a culture, you will find it easier to comprehend and remember its language, including its history, traditions, and lifestyle. Zhang (2024) pointed out that when learning English, it is essential to delve into its cultural background, such as the history, geography, and culture of English-speaking countries. This can enhance language expression ability and better understand as well as handle cultural issues in English exams. Furthermore, English highly values the use of idioms and slang, which are important components of English expression. When learning English, one should pay attention to learning English idioms and slang to avoid misunderstandings and actively use them in communication to make English expressions more natural and fluent.

There are many good strategies to improve cultural immersion. Participating in cultural activities such as festivals, concerts, and theatrical performances can help Chinese English learners practice and use new vocabulary and expressions in real contexts. Food is also a window into a culture. By cooking and tasting local dishes, you can learn food-related

vocabulary and phrases while gaining a deeper understanding of local cultural customs. If possible, the best option is living in an English-speaking environment, directly immersing themselves in the cultural environment.

REFERENCES

XU, Z. Y. **The Contrast between Chinese and Western Civilizations**. Zhejiang: Zhejiang People's Publishing House, 2016.

ZHANG, F. H. Contrast Between Chinese and Western Cultural Values and Its Effects on English Learning in China. **Trans/Form/Ação**: revista de filosofia da Unesp, v. 47, n. 4, "Eastern thought", e0240062, 2024. Available at: <https://revistas.marilia.unesp.br/index.php/transformacao/article/view/14621>.

ZHAO, L. **The Tradition and Evolution of Western Culture**. Beijing: CITIC Press Corporation, 2021.