

On the Evolutionary Logic of Chinese Culture's Integration Into Foreign Language Education in China: A Bibliometric Study of CSSCI Source Journals (1980-2025)

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This paper undertakes a systematic combing of the development of research on integrating Chinese culture into foreign language education in China from the 1980s to 2025, dividing it into three stages: cultural attachment, cultural compensation, and cultural symbiosis, and reveals the logical shift of the research from the dominance of target language culture to the construction of the subjectivity of Chinese culture. Through quantitative and qualitative analysis of 435 CSSCI papers, three core themes are extracted: what to integrate, why to integrate, and how to integrate. This paper critically analyzes three pairs of contradictions: the imbalance between instrumentality and humanism, the separation of national narrative and individual expression, and the disconnection between traditional inheritance and modern transformation. It is proposed that future research should reconstruct the educational logic based on the Chinese context, integrate the national and individual dimensions, and build a dialogue mechanism between tradition and modernity, so as to provide theoretical and practical reference for the construction of a foreign language education system with Chinese characteristics.

Keywords: Chinese culture, foreign language education, cultural integration

Introduction

The symbiosis of language and culture is a consensus in the fields of philosophy and pedagogy. Heidegger stated that “Language is the house of being”, and Wittgenstein claimed that “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world”. Both reveal that language is not only a tool for communication, but also a carrier of cultural spirit and a projection of the way of existence. Foreign language education, if stripped of its cultural dimension, will become a tree without roots. With the in-depth development of globalization and cultural diversity, the value of Chinese culture in China's foreign language education has become increasingly prominent: Foreign language education is not only a tool for understanding the world, but also a medium for interpreting China.

The Guidelines for the Undergraduate Teaching of Foreign Languages and Literature in General Higher Education Institutions (2020) regards patriotism and proficiency in Chinese language and cultural knowledge as the core competencies of foreign language talents; The College English Teaching Guidelines (2020) emphasizes

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that college English should consciously integrate socialist core values and fine traditional Chinese culture. However, research reviews on cultural integration in foreign language education are relatively limited: Some scholars reviewed the research progress of cultural integration before 2007 (Xiao, 2007), some sorted out the development of intercultural foreign language teaching in China (Hu, 2010; Shi & Zhu, 2015), and traced back the relevant international trends (Zhang, 2021). Nevertheless, few studies have systematically combed the development context of research on cultural integration in China's foreign language education over the past four decades.

Focusing on the research achievements of cultural integration in China's foreign language education in the past 40 years, this study aims to answer the following core questions through systematic combing and critical analysis:

1. What is the overall development context of research on cultural integration in China's foreign language education over the past 40 years?

2. What are the core themes and research hotspots of existing studies?

3. What methodological characteristics do these studies present?

It is expected to provide inspiration and reference for future research.

Research Methods

This study takes journal papers from the CSSCI database of CNKI as the research object, and ensures the pertinence of the literature through compound conditional retrieval:

1. The title contains "foreign language" and "culture", or "English" and "culture";

2. The abstract contains "foreign language" and "Chinese culture", or "English" and "Chinese culture".

The time span is from 1980 to 2025, and 1,447 papers are initially retrieved. To ensure the academic quality of the included literature, the screening criteria are formulated as follows: (a) original research papers, (b) content directly related to foreign language education and teaching, and (c) research objects focusing on the higher education stage. Manual retrieval and reference tracing methods are adopted simultaneously, and 435 valid papers are finally identified.

Results and Analysis

Development Trends and Diachronic Changes

The publication trend of research on cultural integration in China's foreign language education over the past four decades can be divided into three stages: the germination and initiation stage (1980-1999), the shock and innovation stage (2000-2013), and the advancement and deepening stage (2014-present) (see Figure 1).

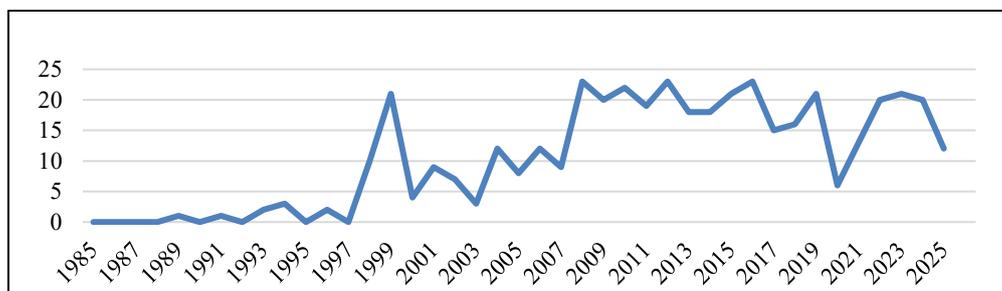


Figure 1. Publication trends of integrating culture into foreign language education.

Stage 1 (1985-1999): Germination and initiation. Research in this stage focused on the introduction of target language culture, mainly on cultural knowledge (Shu, 1996). The number of annual publications was 0 to 3 from 1985 to 1997, and surged to 21 in 1999, with policies serving as the key catalyst.

Stage 2 (2000-2013): Shock and innovation. This stage is marked by Professor Cong Cong's publication of *Aphasia of Chinese Culture: A Defect in China's English Teaching* in 2000. More and more scholars have carried out investigations and reflections on the phenomenon of Chinese cultural aphasia (Zhang & Zhu, 2002; L. Xiao, D. Xiao, Li, & Song, 2010; L. Xiao & D. Xiao, 2013), discussed the value of Chinese culture in foreign language education (Shu, 2013; Wang, 2013), constructed intercultural communicative competence systematically (Hu, 2013), and innovated teaching models and methods for cultural integration in foreign language education (Ren, 2012). A publication peak appeared from 2008 to 2010, driven by the deepening of policies and the opportunity of the Olympic Games.

Stage 3 (2014-present): Advancement and deepening. This stage is marked by the issuance of documents such as *Guidelines for Improving the Education of Fine Traditional Chinese Culture** (2014), leading the academic community to carry out the theoretical construction of integrating Chinese culture into education. The academic community has focused on the integration and international communication of Chinese culture (Xiao, 2024; Sun, 2025), deeply discussed the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence (Sun, 2016; Zhang & Sun, 2024), and continuously innovated the empowerment of artificial intelligence and digital technology for the integration of Chinese culture into foreign language teaching (Kong & Yang, 2025).

The publication trend of research on cultural integration in China's foreign language education over the past four decades is essentially the result of the triangular interaction of "policy guidance—practical demand—academic consciousness".

Research Methods of Relevant Papers

Referring to the classification of non-empirical research methods (Wang & Li, 2013, p. 7) and empirical research methods (Hu, 2005, p. 324), non-empirical research papers include 129 theoretical speculations, 232 experience summaries, eight policy interpretations, and one ethnographic study; empirical research includes 29 general surveys, 15 case studies, nine experimental methods, six quasi-experimental methods, two action researches, and three corpus studies (see Table 1).

Table 1

Statistical Data of Research Methods

Stage	Non-empirical research					Empirical research							
	Theoretical speculation	Experience summarization	Policy interpretation	Ethnography	Subtotal	Survey	Case study	Experimental method	Quasi-experimental method	Action research	Corpus method	Subtotal	Total
Stage 1	13	27	0	0	40	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	40
Stage 2	45	116	3	0	164	14	8	1	1	1	0	25	189
Stage 3	71	89	5	1	166	15	7	8	5	2	3	40	206
Total	129	232	8	1	370	29	15	9	6	2	3	65	435

The research methods in the field of cultural integration into foreign language education show phased characteristics of "non-empirical dominance with the gradual development of empirical research". Non-empirical

research has always been absolutely dominant (370 papers, 85%). In the early stage, it mainly focused on theoretical speculation and experience summary, and in the later stage, a coordinated pattern of “theoretical speculation, practical reflection and policy response” was formed. Empirical research has gradually grown from scratch (65 papers, 15%), with methods expanding from a single survey to diverse ones, such as experimental methods and corpus studies. However, general surveys still account for 45% (29 papers) of the total empirical research, with insufficient application of in-depth methods.

Research Hotspots

Cluster analysis of keywords (frequency ≥ 15) shows that research hotspots include intercultural communication, English teaching, intercultural communicative competence, foreign language education, culture, college English teaching, etc. After merging similar keywords, cultural consciousness, cultural confidence, curriculum-based moral education, telling Chinese stories well, fine traditional Chinese culture, native culture, textbook development have become core issues, and their evolution presents distinct phased characteristics.

1985-1999: Enlightenment of cultural awareness and one-way cognition. In the early stage of globalization, foreign language education focused on the instrumentality of language, and research concentrated on Western culture, cultural differences and background knowledge, essentially serving the one-way cognition of the West.

2000-2013: Awakening and reflection of local culture. With the sharp increase of two-way exchanges after China’s accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), the phenomenon of “Chinese cultural aphasia” has attracted attention. Research has shifted from passive acceptance of Western culture to reflection on the lack of local culture, and research on intercultural communicative competence has begun to incorporate the dimension of Chinese cultural expression.

2014-2024: Cultural confidence and strategic reconstruction. The upgrading of the national cultural strategy has promoted the transformation of research paradigm, with “cultural confidence” and “telling Chinese stories well” becoming core propositions. Research has broken through the level of teaching skills and gone deep into the reconstruction of textbook system and the innovation of teaching methods.

Research Themes

To further present the research context and the whole picture, combining high-frequency keywords and literature content, the research can be summarized into three modules: what to integrate, why to integrate, and how to integrate, forming a progressive logical chain of “content-value-practice”.

“What to integrate”: Value orientation and hierarchical division of cultural content. The core premise of cultural integration is to clarify “what to integrate”, which involves the value orientation of cultural selection and the in-depth division of content levels, including the discussion on the weight of Chinese and foreign cultures and the analysis of the connotative levels of culture. Hierarchical division of cultural content: The content of cultural integration is divided into four levels according to depth: linguistic level, material level, institutional level, and value level. Linguistic level: focusing on the cultural connotation in vocabulary and pragmatic; material level: covering concrete cultural symbols, such as diet and clothing; institutional level: involving social norms and institutional systems; and value level: The core is world outlook and values.

“Why to integrate”: Necessity and era demands. Research on the motivation of cultural integration not only responds to the essence of education, but also serves national strategies, covering three dimensions: reflection on the current situation, competence cultivation, and value guidance.

Current situation reflection: From “aphasia” to “imbalance”. Xiao Longfu et al. (2010) found via empirical research that 82% of English majors cannot express core cultural concepts like “Spring Festival” and “filial piety” in foreign languages, exposing the “West-preferring over local-neglecting” teaching imbalance. Sun Tai (2025) further noted English majors’ “fragmented cognition of traditional culture”, which disconnects from cultural confidence cultivation. This imbalance restricts students’ cultural expression and causes “identity ambiguity” in intercultural communication (Gao, 2002).

Competence cultivation: From “language skills” to “intercultural literacy”. The National Standards lists “intercultural competence” as a core indicator for foreign language majors, shifting research from “language instrumentalism” to “literacy integration theory”. Pan Yaling (2008) proved cultural integration boosts students’ intercultural adaptation ability by over 40% through empirical studies; Pan Wenguo (2021) stressed “It is key to enhancing foreign language proficiency”. Moreover, it lays the foundation for “telling Chinese stories well”, as Li Liwen and Yang Hua (2025) illustrated via the “digital narrative” course that cultural cognition precedes intercultural communication.

Value guidance: From skill-centered to value-oriented. Scholars have elaborated on the value of integrating fine traditional Chinese culture into higher foreign language education, discussing it from curriculum-based moral education and national security perspectives (Guo & Ma, 2023). Others interpreted its value-leading role from cultural consciousness, identity, and confidence angles (Yan & Yu, 2025), emphasizing it as a vital path for national spirit inheritance and cultural sovereignty protection.

“How to integrate”: Practical paths and implementation systems.

Curriculum and teaching. From “single-point introduction” to “systematic design”, developing teaching models, such as critical practice (Zhang & Zhao, 2018), project-based learning and thematic integration (Du, 2025).

Textbook development. From “content accumulation” to “literacy-oriented”. By comparing Chinese and foreign textbooks, some scholars found that the proportion of local culture in China’s textbooks is relatively low, and advocated developing foreign language textbooks with distinct local characteristics to improve students’ local cultural literacy.

Technological empowerment. Digital technology breaks the constraints of time and space and forms diverse application scenarios. Some scholars have constructed “MOOCs for Chinese and foreign students to learn together” (Suo & Chi, 2018); some used AI to analyze students’ weaknesses in cultural cognition and accurately push personalized resources (Kong & Yang, 2025).

Teachers’ literacy. Some scholars pointed out that to transform from “language experts” to “cultural mediators” (Fu & Zhang, 2017).

Learner factors. Focusing on motivation stimulation, identity construction, and strategy application (Li & Cao, 2023), shifting from “passive acceptance” to “active construction”.

Implications

The research on integrating Chinese culture into foreign language education is closely linked to the educational concepts and theoretical frameworks of specific periods, featuring “expanding theoretical perspectives and deepening value positioning” and falling into three stages.

1980-1999: The Stage of Cultural Attachment Dominated by Language Instrumentalism

Influenced by structural linguistics and communicative competence theory, foreign language education at this stage focused on mastering target language rules and cultural customs, forming a target language culture-

centered paradigm. The integration of Chinese culture remained “hidden”, reduced to an “auxiliary tool for language learning”.

Guided by the “contrastive analysis hypothesis”, research concentrated on “the impact of Sino-Western cultural differences on language use”. Chinese culture only served as a “control for target language culture”, confined to vocabulary supplementation or custom comparison without touching cultural core values. Though some scholars advocated native cultural value (Gao, 1994), the target language culture-centered mainstream paradigm persisted. Essentially as a product of “instrumental rationality”, Chinese culture integration depended on its direct contribution to “language communication efficiency”, overshadowing its humanistic value.

2000-2017: The Stage of Cultural Compensation Driven by Intercultural Communication Theory

The proposal of “Chinese cultural aphasia” in 2000 (Cong, 2000) marked the entry of research into the stage of “reflection and compensation”. The academic community called for compensating Chinese culture to achieve balance, pointing out that the lack of native culture would lead to the loss of expression ability and identity crisis (Gao, 2002), and carried out investigations on the current situation. Research began to call for compensating Chinese culture in intercultural education to achieve a balance between native culture and target language culture. Although research in this stage broke through the limitation of one-way cultural input, its theoretical foundation still relied on the Western intercultural communicative competence framework, and the positioning of Chinese culture was still a supplement to avoid defects, without forming independent value consciousness.

2014-Present: The Stage of Cultural Symbiosis Under the Theory of Cultural Consciousness and the Concept of Curriculum-Based Moral Education

The intensive issuance of policy documents, such as Guidelines for Improving the Education of Fine Traditional Chinese Culture (2014) and Guidelines for the Construction of Curriculum-Based Moral Education in Higher Education Institutions (2020) has driven the research on integrating Chinese culture into foreign language education into the stage of cultural symbiosis with active construction. Based on the theories of “cultural consciousness” and “moral education”, the research focus has shifted to local culture, cultural confidence, curriculum-based moral education, and international communication, clearly regarding the integration of Chinese culture as the core component of the educational value of foreign language education.

Research in this stage clearly put forward that the ultimate goal of integrating Chinese culture is to cultivate “intercultural communicators with cultural confidence and a global vision”—who need to not only understand foreign cultures, but also “tell Chinese stories well in foreign languages” and adhere to subjectivity in cultural dialogue (Wen, 2022). Relevant research shows a multidimensional expansion trend: At the level of value interpretation, the academic community has systematically demonstrated the ontological value of Chinese culture in foreign language education from the perspectives of cultural identity, cultural confidence, and the construction of Chinese cultural awareness; at the level of practical paths, scholars have carried out explorations around the propositions of “spreading China’s voice to the world” and “telling Chinese stories well”, and gone deep into specific links, such as curriculum setting, textbook compilation, and teaching methods; at the level of technological empowerment, research has begun to pay attention to the supporting role of digital tools in the integration of Chinese culture.

Researches in this stage have achieved a key shift from instrumental compensation to value construction, and clearly proposed returning to the native cultural standard, promoting the subjective and localized development of Chinese culture, highlighting the Chinese stance, and committing to enhancing cultural

confidence through moral education and cultivating international talents with both local roots and a global vision. However, there are still deep-seated contradictions in theory and practice that need to be resolved urgently.

Researches on integrating Chinese culture into foreign language education have advanced, yet three core contradictions remain in its theoretical and practical development, revealing research limitations and indicating innovation directions.

Imbalance Between Instrumentality and Humanism

Existing research pursues the balance of the two but still focuses on knowledge transmission in practice, simplifying Chinese culture into quantifiable knowledge and centering teaching tests on knowledge assessment. This neglects the humanistic core of Chinese culture, which requires internalization through experience rather than memory. Lacking operable paths for humanistic literacy cultivation, the integration is urged by national policies to return to educational essence. The Confucian tradition of self-cultivation, together with embodied cognition and constructivist learning theories, offers a theoretical basis for building a cultivation-centered practical path that combines Chinese cultural education with intercultural competence development.

Separation of National Narrative and Individual Expression

Current studies stress the macro value of cultural integration for national soft power but ignore individual-level demands, such as cultural identity construction and personal expression in intercultural communication. Relevant theories and policies highlight value guidance rooted in individual experience and all-round personal development, requiring the explanation of Chinese culture's value for individuals. Fei Xiaotong's cultural consciousness and the student development-centered concept both point to the need to explore individual expression of national culture, thus unifying national narrative and individual practice.

Disconnection Between Traditional Inheritance and Modern Transformation

Existing research overemphasizes traditional Chinese cultural symbols while ignoring their contemporary forms and practical values, with target language culture still dominant in foreign language textbooks. Guidelines and scholars' views confirm the modern value of traditional culture and the need to link it with socialist core values, yet this connection is not realized in practice. Isolating Chinese culture from real life makes it unable to serve as individuals' spiritual resource and easily leads learners to regard it as outdated knowledge.

Conclusion

The 40-year evolution of research on integrating Chinese culture into China's foreign language education reflects the awakening process of China's foreign language education from instrumental rationality to value rationality. From cultural attachment to cultural compensation and then to cultural symbiosis, the research has gradually broken through the shackles of Eurocentrism, but the contradictions between instrumentality and humanism, national narrative and individual expression, and tradition and modernity have not been fundamentally resolved.

Future research should base itself on the Chinese context, reconstruct the educational logic, and organically combine the educational core of Chinese culture with the affective and attitudinal dimension of intercultural competence; integrate national narrative and individual expression, and convey the core values of national culture through individuals' cultural practice; build a dialogue mechanism between tradition and modernity, and make traditional cultural wisdom a tool for solving global problems. Only in this way can Chinese culture truly become a spiritual resource for learners to settle down and an ideological tool for understanding the world, and ultimately

realize the ultimate goal of foreign language education to cultivate complete people. As the master of Chinese studies Zhang Dainian (2000) pointed out: "Economy is becoming globalized, but each nation must maintain the independence of its national culture. The richness and diversity of culture is the prospect of the development of world culture". The integration of Chinese culture into foreign language education is related to the improvement of individuals' intercultural competence, the inheritance of national culture and national cultural security. The in-depth exploration of this proposition will provide important support for the construction of a foreign language education system with Chinese characteristics.

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