
On Strategies of Integrating Chinese Traditional Culture into College Foreign Language Classrooms

Wang Wenjing¹ Hua Jing²

(1. Wang Wenjing, first author, MA student of School of Foreign Languages, East China University of Science and Technology; 2. Hua Jing, corresponding author, Associate Professor of School of Foreign Languages, East China University of Science and Technology, Shanghai, 200237, China)

Abstract: Due to their particular professional backgrounds, college students and teachers of foreign languages have become the main carriers of the Chinese traditional culture “going out”. It is of great significance to integrate the Chinese traditional culture into daily foreign language classes and form a joint force between teachers and students to promote the Chinese traditional culture into and out of the foreign language classrooms. With students majoring in English, Japanese and German in East China University of Science and Technology as research subjects, this paper explores the current cognition status of students and teachers on the Chinese traditional culture, analyzes the “aphasia” condition faced by the Chinese traditional culture in current foreign language classrooms, and finally proposes a joint training strategy of tripartite cooperation, with colleges and universities innovating online and offline classrooms, teachers integrating Chinese traditional culture with their research directions, and students utilizing new media platforms. The proposed strategy aims to integrate factors of Chinese traditional cultures into foreign language classroom and improve the traditional cultural literacy of foreign language majors, so as to provide positive and useful thinking and references for students to promote Chinese traditional culture “going out of the foreign language classrooms”.

Key words: Chinese traditional culture; foreign language students; foreign language teachers; foreign language classrooms

Chinese culture accumulates the deepest spiritual pursuit of the Chinese nation containing the most fundamental spiritual gene and represents the unique spiritual identity of the Chinese people, which is the rich nourishment for the continuous growth and development of the country. Nowadays, with the in-depth development of globalization, the competitions of various countries in cultural soft power are intensifying. How to promote the “going out” of Chinese traditional culture in reality that European and American countries are

frantically exporting their own culture has become an urgent problem to be solved. Due to their unique characteristics in major, foreign language students play an indispensable role as a bridge in the process of spreading Chinese traditional culture to the world. However, it is the nature of their majors that throws the traditional Chinese culture into a state of “aphasia”. And the foreign language teachers who act as “leaders” in class are also lost in “aphasia” while teaching English. As a result, it has become necessary to promote Chinese traditional culture to “enter foreign language classrooms”. At present, experts and scholars have paid attention to and carried out research on it. In September 2021, when the author used “traditional culture + college student education” as keywords searching on CNKI, there were 629 published academic journals, 56 dissertations, and 9 other conference newspapers. Based on the questionnaire, Sun Yunzeng^[1] took 200 foreign language students from Xi’an International Studies University as the sample object to describe and analyze the current situation and characteristics of foreign language majors in terms of their cognition of traditional culture in proofreading, the influence of the language corresponding to the national culture and their attitude towards traditional culture and foreign culture, and then provided some suggestions on improving the traditional culture education among foreign language majors. When it comes to the in-depth analysis of the profound connotations of Chinese traditional culture, Miao Qing^[2] put forward its great significance for the foreign language majors’ education and development aiming to draw a practical training plan according to their ideological characteristics. Su Chengrong^[3] pointed out the problems existing in the integration of Chinese traditional culture into the ideological and political education of foreign language majors, such as lack of initiative of foreign language majors to learn Chinese traditional culture, the trend of diverse and changeable values, and the weak atmosphere of Chinese traditional culture education in colleges and universities, etc., with the purpose of finding out a valid path to enhance the cultural awareness and cultural self-confidence of foreign language students. Sun Yunzeng and Wang Kai^[4] firstly analyzed and summarized the characteristics of foreign language students, and then introduced their advantages and disadvantages in detail, laying a foundation for further improving their traditional cultural literacy.

However, while searching for “traditional culture + foreign language major”, only 13 academic journals were obtained. It can be said that there are few already-existing studies on the traditional cultural literacy of foreign language students. Instead, concentrating on two subjects, i.e. the foreign language students and the foreign language teachers at universities from the perspective of the traditional culture of China “entering into and out of the foreign language classroom”, to explore the literacy cultivation path is of certain innovation and practicality. There is no doubt that every foreign language teacher should take responsibility for promoting Chinese traditional culture “going out”. As the most advantageous and potential messengers of Chinese traditional culture, foreign language students should become the vanguard of driving Chinese traditional culture to go abroad and to the world. In addition, the foreign language class shouldn’t be confined to introducing foreign languages and cultures. Instead, Chinese traditional culture “entering into and out of foreign language classrooms” enjoys practical significance and values. Through a questionnaire survey among students majoring in English, Japanese, and German languages in East China University of Science and Technology, this paper explores the current situation of Chinese traditional cultural literacy, analyzes the reasons behind it, and puts forward practical

measures in a targeted manner in order to promote the traditional Chinese culture “into and out of the foreign language classroom”, effectively improve the traditional cultural literacy of foreign language students featuring in science and engineering colleges.

I. Survey on the traditional Chinese cultural literacy of foreign language students in ECUST

This online questionnaire survey is mainly aimed at the students majoring in English, Japanese and German in the School of Foreign Languages of East China University of Science and Technology, to explore their cognition of traditional Chinese culture and the main ways to acquire cultural knowledge. A total of 120 questionnaires were distributed, and 112 were effectively recovered. According to the survey results, when asked what traditional Chinese culture includes, the top three choices are “piano, chess, painting and calligraphy” (96 percent), “traditional festivals” (92 percent), and “traditional cuisine” (90 percent). “Literary and artistic works”(12 percent), “religious ideas” (53 percent) and “ethnic minorities” (57 percent) ranked last. When asked “how much they know about the traditional Chinese culture”, only about 5% of the students choose “very much”, while the majority chooses “partly” or “a little” (as shown in Figure 1). About 87% of the students chooses “online media news and extra-curricular reading materials”, 80% chooses “film and television works”, and only about 40% chooses “classroom” (as shown in Figure 2).

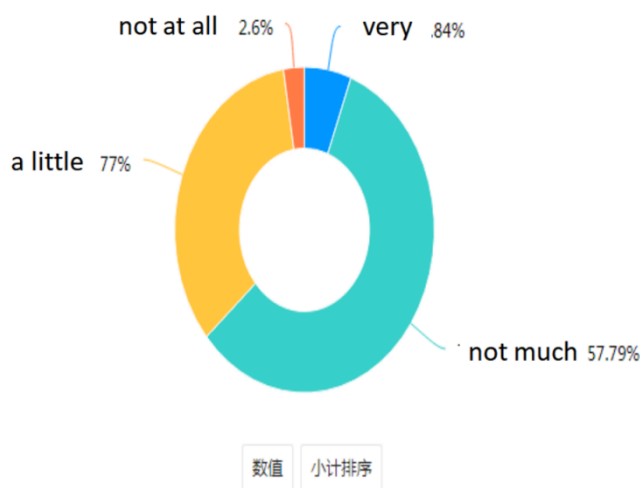


Fig. 1: “How much do you know about the Chinese traditional culture?”

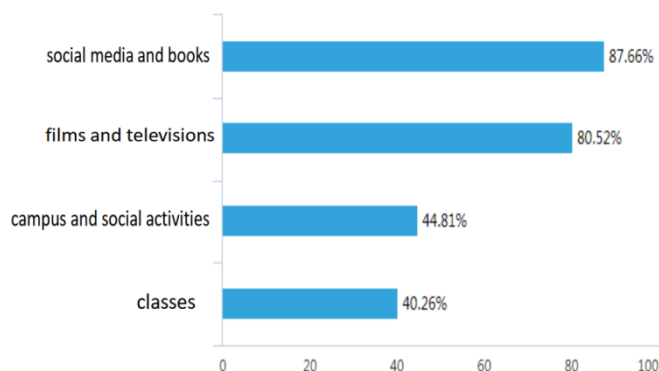


Fig. 2: “In what ways do you often come into contact with the Chinese traditional culture?”

At the same time, when asked “whether it is necessary to add courses related to the Chinese traditional culture in professional courses or elective courses” (see Figure 3) and “should foreign language teachers and foreign language majors in Chinese colleges and universities strengthen their traditional cultural literacy?” (See Figure 4), about 86% and 91% of the students give a positive answer to these two questions. It’s obvious that the vast majority of students holds a positive and open attitude towards learning the traditional Chinese culture, but their access to knowledge is relatively simple especially in classroom, which has an indelible impact on their cognition, and thus they cannot benefit from the Chinese traditional culture.

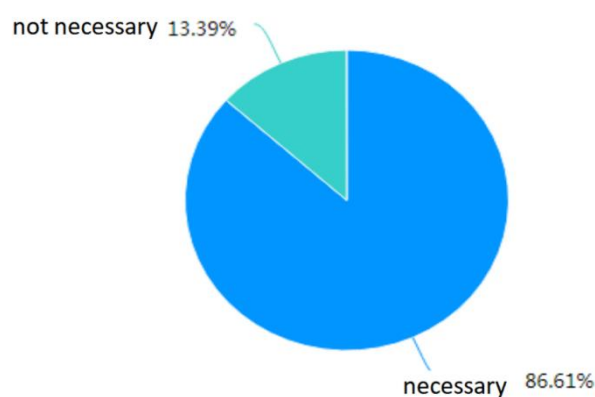


Fig. 3: “Whether it is necessary to add courses related to Chinese traditional culture in professional or elective courses?”

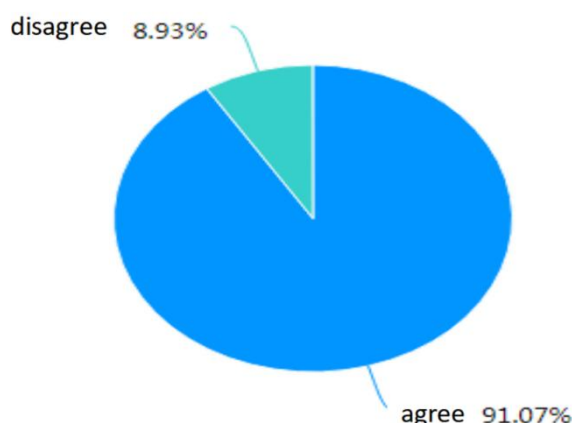


Fig. 4: “Should Chinese college foreign language teachers and foreign language students strengthen their traditional cultural literacy?”

II. Reasons for the Chinese traditional cultural literacy of college students

According to the results of survey, while cultivating foreign language students, the School of Foreign Languages of East China University of Science and Technology focuses on the professional training of listening, speaking, reading and writing of the language they are learning and the input of related language, culture, writing and literature. For example, in the courses for students majoring in English, Japanese and German, the college clearly sets up the national profile culture of the language studied, such as “Overview of Japan”, “Overview of Britain and the United States”, “Overview of Germany” and so on. Of course, the professional training program of the School of Foreign Languages of East China University of Science and Technology is not an exception. By investigating the training programs of students in the School of Foreign Languages of Shanghai University of Science and Technology, it is found that whether it is Tongji University, Donghua University, 211 and 985 colleges and universities, ordinary colleges and universities represented by Shanghai University of Science and Technology, Shanghai Maritime University, and Shanghai University of Applied Science and Technology all adopt similar single training programs. Taking Donghua University as an example, its training goal is to hope that students can systematically master English (Japanese) language, literature, cultural knowledge, and the basic theory and knowledge of English-Chinese bilingual translation. Besides, the foreign language students can acquire bilingual expression skills in Chinese and English with language application ability, innovative awareness and international vision after systematic training in English language, literature, interpretation and translation skills. Correspondingly, the school has set up a series of professional courses including “English audio-visual, English intensive reading, British and American overview, cross-cultural communication, British and American novels, British and American poetry and drama”, etc.. The training goal of Tongji University emphasizes the international vision and humanistic feelings of foreign language students, and advocates that students integrate

Chinese and foreign languages, lead the bilingual development at home and abroad. In addition, it has opened up courses of Chinese civilization, Western civilization, multicultural communication and leadership decision-making, multiculturalism and global governance, the construction of Chinese foreign discourse, and the comparison of Chinese and Western ways of thinking and so on. However, these courses are limited and lack of representation. Combined with the requirements of the “English Teaching Syllabus for English Majors in Colleges and Universities” promulgated in 2000, every university should offer courses such as “British and American Society and Culture”, “Western Culture”, “Introduction to Western Culture” to help the foreign language students master the knowledge of Western culture. It can be seen that the training programs and plans for foreign language students have seriously neglected the learning and inheritance of the Chinese tradition. The survey results showed that about 58% of the students chose a negative answer while answering “is there any content related to the traditional Chinese culture in the current professional courses or elective courses”. It can be seen that the traditional Chinese culture has always been in a state of “aphasia” during the process of cultivating foreign language majors. Scholar Zhang Qunxing once also said: “there are some problems in Foreign language education in China, such as too narrow specialized education, too much cultural influence and too much skill orientation”^[5]. There is no denying that the contemporary university education pays more attention to “specializing in its majors”, emphasizing the learning of professional knowledge and the mastery of skills, which is inevitable for non-Chinese majors or related majors to ignore Chinese traditional culture.

Take foreign language students as an example. Influenced by the nature of their majors, most students focus on improving their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills of the foreign languages they are studying, and therefore they are accustomed to obtaining various language-related certificates in order to enhance their professional knowledge and skills. For example, students majoring in English are faced with the pressure of examination for acquiring TEM4 and TEM 8 certifications. Students who want to go abroad also need to get TOEFL or IELTS certificate. What’s more, the translation certificate has gradually become the standard configuration for translation majors. Similarly, students majoring in Japanese and German are also confronted with a variety of pressure of examination. In addition, the competitions that foreign language students take part in are almost related to their majors, aiming at training their professional abilities. Few students take part in the related activities or competitions that can inherit and carry forward the traditional Chinese culture. In spite of that, with the popularity of the Internet, college students have become active users and subjects of mobile phones and they are easily addicted to the complicated events and information online, which hinders college students from discriminating traditional culture. Even if some students want to take on the responsibility of carrying forward the traditional Chinese culture, they may be at a loss and lose interest. Foreign language majors, living in foreign cultures, will feel “cultural inferiority complex” if they lose the inheritance and learning of their own traditional culture, because, as Durasis-srinivas emphasized that “to become the emission of culture, a country or a civilization must have sufficient cultural self-awareness. It must understand how much potential it has as an entity of disseminating culture, and at the same time, it must understand its relationship with other civilizations”^[6]. So, at present, foreign language majors themselves lack a certain understanding of the traditional Chinese culture, so it

is difficult for them to shoulder the historical responsibility of promoting Chinese traditional culture abroad. It is gratifying to note that nearly 86% of the students in the questionnaire support the addition of courses related to Chinese traditional culture in professional courses or elective courses. Therefore, colleges or schools to improve the current single training program and adjust the corresponding professional curriculum is also an inevitable choice to meet the reasonable requirements of students. Unilateral adjustment of curriculum can not comprehensively improve students' traditional cultural literacy, but teachers of specialized courses, namely foreign language teachers, are required to shoulder the burden of sowing the seeds of traditional Chinese culture. However, since foreign language teachers have also grown up under the above-mentioned training programs, they attach importance to language mastery and neglect cultural knowledge, especially the study of traditional Chinese cultural knowledge. As a result, it is inevitable that their traditional Chinese cultural literacy is not high enough. According to the questionnaire, nearly half of the students chose a negative answer to the question "whether the teacher will talk about or introduce traditional Chinese culture in class". When asked "whether they agree that foreign language teachers in colleges and universities should improve their traditional cultural literacy", 91% of the students said "yes". Therefore, due to the limitation of academic background, foreign language teachers fail to export traditional Chinese culture in class, deliver the connotation of Chinese and foreign culture to students, and guide them to establish cultural consciousness and cultural confidence.

III. The feasible path of college students' Chinese traditional cultural accomplishment

In view of the phenomenon that foreign language students in science and engineering universities, represented by East China University of Science and Technology, are not well educated in traditional Chinese culture, this paper puts forward a training strategy that colleges and universities innovate online and offline classes, teachers combine with personal research direction, and students rely on new media platform to form joint forces, with the hope that the factors of Chinese traditional culture can be injected into the foreign language classroom, so as to effectively improve the traditional cultural literacy of foreign language majors.

3.1 School and University level effort to integrate traditional Chinese culture into "foreign language classroom"

First of all, as the main body of curriculum program planning, schools or colleges should actively respond to the advocacy of CPC Central Committee to coordinate Chinese traditional culture into the foreign language majors cultivation scheme forming online and offline two platforms as the main way of education, maximize the output of Chinese traditional culture among students and improve their traditional culture accomplishment. As for online courses, the college can rely on the online teaching platform of MOOC and cooperate with other liberal arts colleges and universities to guide students to watch and learn online courses related to the traditional Chinese culture explained by famous teachers from other colleges and universities. According to the survey, East China

University of Science and Technology offers a total of 18 courses on the MOOC platform of Chinese universities, of which only one course, “Language and culture exploration”, is related to Chinese culture. Coincidentally, among the 89 courses offered by Tongji University, only one course, “History of Chinese and Foreign Landscape Architecture”, is involved with traditional Chinese culture. Similarly, Donghua University provides a total of nine courses, none of which introduces traditional Chinese culture, while other Shanghai universities of science and technology, such as the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology and Shanghai Maritime University, do not even present courses on MOOCs. With the popularity of the Internet and the impact of the epidemic, online learning has become a new development trend equipping with much more potential and vitality. Therefore, the development of online teaching content based on MOOCs by colleges and universities is not only a response to the trend of times, but also a positive attempt to enrich teaching methods and innovate teaching methods. Of course, in order to motivate students, the college can also set corresponding credits and fixed assessment methods to cultivate students’ earnest and practical learning attitude, so as to improve their participation in class. The offline traditional classroom can invite famous teachers from colleges and universities into the classroom by hiring experts outside the university to have close interaction with students and learn traditional Chinese culture together. Of course, the existing resources of the university can also be used to encourage professional teachers to actively participate in the teaching activities of traditional Chinese culture. For example, the School of Marxism of East China University of Science and Technology has set up a course called “Introduction to Chinese Culture”, which mainly guides students to be inspirational and enlightened by Confucius, Mencius, Master Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi, through narrating the characteristics of Chinese culture. In order to better integrate the traditional Chinese culture with the advanced foreign culture, the College may set up the English elective course like the “Traditional Chinese Culture” based on the particularity of the subject, with the purpose of spreading the Chinese culture to the outside world and promoting Chinese culture to the world. In 2015, Pro. Zhang Zhiyan from East China University of Science and Technology opened an elective course named “Selected Readings of Shakespeare” for foreign language students. In this course, Pro. Zhang tried to use the dialogue and integration of Chinese and Western operas to lead students to act as a bridge to connect Chinese culture with Western culture. Courses focus on Shakespeare’s plays, such as Shakespearian version comparison research, Shakespeare in China, like the Chinese images in Shakespeare, Pro. Zhang in the classroom encouraged students to apply English to make comparative analysis among the traditional dramas written by Tang Xianzu in Ming dynasty and Shakespeare in western world, through which Chinese traditional dramas and western plays can transcend national borders and interact with each other, so as to truly promote the traditional Chinese culture “going out of the foreign language classroom and entering into the world”.

3.2 Teachers’ effort to bring Chinese traditional culture out of “foreign language classroom”

The optimization of the above curriculum is conducive to improving the traditional cultural literacy of foreign language students. On this premise, we should give full play to students and teachers, who behave like “vanguard” and “leader” during the process respectively, and promote the traditional Chinese culture “out of the

foreign language classroom”. As an old saying goes, “a teacher, therefore, preaches, teaches and dispels doubts”. The duty of college foreign language teachers is not only to teach foreign language students professional knowledge, but also to help them establish a correct cultural outlook and enhance their cultural consciousness and self-confidence. As General Secretary Xi Jinping said: “we should strengthen self-confidence in the road, theory and system of socialism with Chinese characteristics. In the final analysis, we should strengthen cultural confidence. Cultural self-confidence is a more basic, deeper and more lasting force in the development of a country or a nation. Cultural self-confidence is the Chinese nation’s belief in self-cultural ideals, values, vitality and prospects”^[7]. As the “receiver” of foreign culture, foreign language students may lack the ability to distinguish the good from the bad. We should not only guide students to absorb foreign culture, but also inculcate students with profound contents of Chinese traditional culture, so as to help them not forget their own cultural traditions while learning foreign languages, and strive to be “messengers” of cultural communication. During this process, teachers and students should work together to form a strong joint force really promoting traditional Chinese culture to the world. Taking Pro. Zhang Zhiyan from the School of Foreign Languages of East China University of Science and Technology as an example, Pro. Zhang combined with her research direction making it a benchmark for spreading traditional Chinese culture, looked for the common ground or similarities between Chinese and foreign cultures through letting Chinese traditional opera(Kunqu Opera) dance with Shakespeare’s drama, and implemented the course of bilingualism drama via leading students to get close to Chinese traditional and foreign classical dramas, all of which propels students to inherit the drama culture of our country, build a bridge of exchange and cooperation between Chinese and foreign dramas, and strive to promote the “going out” of Chinese traditional opera culture. First of all, Pro. Zhang is the leader to guide students to translate the Kunqu Opera “Romeo and Juliet” and it won the “grand prize” in the 2021 Shakespeare’s new translation competition. At the same time, it was successfully performed at the Edinburgh Art Festival and included by the British Shakespeare Association. It is obvious that all foreign language teachers and students jointly promote Chinese traditional culture dancing with foreign culture and “going out”.

3.3 Students’ innovative effort to combine “in” and “out” of classrooms

As the main body of this questionnaire survey, students should innovate their thinking in learning traditional Chinese culture and put forward more interesting and beneficial learning methods, so as to let Chinese traditional culture “go into and out of foreign language classroom”, and truly realize that Chinese traditional culture is rooted in students’ campus life and actively blooms in the international stage. In the new media era, WeChat public platform has become an important source of information for people. Its various promotional forms, such as audio, video, radio, live broadcast, etc., will undoubtedly become a priority platform for carrying forward and spreading the traditional Chinese culture. Through WeChat public account to absorb, display and spread traditional Chinese culture, students can enrich their platform contents including: thematic articles, such as Chinese traditional diet, Chinese traditional clothing, Chinese traditional ethics, Chinese traditional literature, Chinese traditional folk skills(such as paper cutting, shadow play, embroidery, Dragon dance,etc.) and traditional Chinese festivals;

students personal talent video display, such as classical music, traditional dance, calligraphy and painting, etc.; traditional culture broadcasting stations, like traditional poetry and ode recitation, classic reading and so on. In addition, students can apply for the traditional cultural activities every month to hold various celebrations on the day of important traditional festivals, such as traditional festival essay, traditional culture knowledge competition, traditional craft theme exhibition, etc., expand the influence of traditional festivals, enhance students understanding of traditional festivals, and create a strong traditional culture atmosphere in the whole campus. In the traditional culture activity month, students can invite international students from the university to participate in the activities, or play games, such as “prize competition”, or in the form of theme lectures, introduce the specific background and content of the traditional Chinese culture to the overseas students, and actively guide them to tell about the traditional culture similar or different in their countries, so as to deepen the understanding and understanding between cultures. During the whole process of the activity, videos can be recorded and the selected highlights can be publicized on the WeChat public platform. Relying on the WeChat public platform, it will enhance the students’ consciousness of inheriting and carrying forward the traditional Chinese culture, make the Chinese traditional culture deeply rooted in every student’s heart and become the kindling for students to promote the “going out” of Chinese traditional culture.

IV. Conclusion

Promoting the traditional Chinese culture “into the foreign language classroom” is in response to the advocacy of General Secretary Xi Jinping in the seventh part of the report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China: “Culture is the soul of a country and a nation. If there is no high degree of cultural confidence and cultural prosperity, there will be no great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”^[8]. With the deepening development of globalization, only by establishing a high degree of cultural consciousness and self-confidence can we truly stand in the world in spirit, and only by inheriting and carrying forward the traditional culture of the Chinese nation can we achieve this goal. Similarly, the reason why we should promote the traditional Chinese culture to “go out of the foreign language classroom” is that the traditional Chinese culture is the accumulation and wisdom crystallization of thousands of years of civilization, the source of our spirit and the root of our thoughts. We should not only learn from the traditional Chinese culture, but also promote it to go abroad and be accepted and recognized by the world. The historical mission of the new era requires our “vanguard”-foreign language students to make full use of their unique advantages. At the same time, we should build a good bridge of cultural exchange and cooperation between China and foreign countries, and truly promote Chinese traditional culture “going out”. In this process, a strong joint force should be formed among universities, teachers and students, and students should make joint efforts to penetrate the traditional Chinese culture into and out of foreign language classroom, and to the world stage.

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Authors:

- 1.Wang Wenjing, MA student of School of foreign languages, East China University of Science and Technology.
2. Hua Jing, PhD, Associate Professor, School of Foreign Languages, East China University of Science and Technology, Research Interest:Cross-culture communication, comparative literature and translation studies.