Vol.6 Iss.2 2025 Communication & Education Review
https://doi.org/10.37420/j.cer.2025.031

The Research on English Major Teaching Driven by Project-Based Learning Model—Taking Telling Chinese Stories in English as an Example

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Abstract:

Amid China's global initiatives to "tell China's story well," this study addresses the critical gap in English education, where traditional pedagogies prioritize grammar and standardized assessments over cultural confidence and practical communication skills. Through a project-based learning (PBL) framework centered on Sichuan embroidery—a 2,000-year-old intangible cultural heritage—the research investigates how integrating cultural storytelling with language acquisition empowers English majors to articulate China's narratives authentically and creatively. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining a literature review, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and artifact analysis, to evaluate a four-week PBL intervention involving senior English majors in undergraduates education.

Key findings reveal three transformative outcomes. First, cultural authenticity was deepened as students engaged with embroidery's symbolic motifs (e.g., pandas for harmony, lotus for purity) and collaborated with artisans, fostering an understanding of heritage as dynamic and adaptive. Second, linguistic proficiency advanced through creative discourse strategies, such as metaphor ("threaded harmony" for yin-yang balance) and multimodal storytelling (QR-linked artisan videos), enabling students to navigate untranslatable concepts. Third, collaborative learning cultivated interdisciplinary teamwork and intercultural negotiation skills, essential for global dialogue, as students co-created bilingual documentaries and exhibits. Challenges included balancing regional specificity with global accessibility and aligning PBL's student-driven ethos with standardized assessments.

The study concludes that PBL offers a replicable model for humanities-oriented language education, synergizing linguistic agility with cultural literacy. By transforming classrooms into spaces where students critically reinterpret heritage through projects like Sichuan embroidery, this approach aligns with China's strategic goals of fostering cultural confidence and global communication. Practical implications include curriculum reforms that prioritize experiential, collaborative learning and institutional support for teacher training in interdisciplinary methods. This research underscores the urgency of reimagining English education to cultivate ambassadors capable of bridging China's cultural narratives with universal themes like resilience and sustainability, ensuring resonant cross-cultural dialogue in an interconnected world.

Keywords:

English Major, PBL, Telling China's Story

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1. Introduction

Amid globalization and China's deepening global interactions, English has solidified its role as a critical medium for cross-cultural dialogue. For English majors in Chinese universities, this demands not only linguistic mastery but also the capacity to act as cultural ambassadors, articulating China's narratives to international audiences. However, traditional pedagogical approaches—over-reliant on grammar drills and standardized assessments—struggle to cultivate the practical communication skills or cultural confidence required for this dual mandate. While project-based learning (PBL) has emerged as a transformative method to bridge language acquisition and cultural storytelling, its implementation in Chinese English education faces systemic and pedagogical challenges. This thesis investigates the application of PBL in English courses for majors, centering on the theme "Using English to Tell China's Story", to explore how it synergizes language proficiency with cultural identity construction.

1.1. Background and Significance

1.1.1 The Evolving Role of English Majors in China

China's global initiatives, including the "Belt and Road"and the directive to "tell China's story well", have redefined English education's objectives. English majors are now positioned as proactive narrators of China's cultural, historical, and contemporary identity, rather than passive language learners. This paradigm shift necessitates pedagogical frameworks that transcend rote memorization, fostering critical thinking, cultural literacy, and rhetorical adaptability for nuanced intercultural exchanges. Yet, prevailing curricula remain constrained by exam-centric models, which prioritize discrete language skills over holistic communicative competence. Consequently, students often lack the creativity and contextual understanding needed to engage global audiences authentically.

1.1.2 The Promise and Pitfalls of Project-Based Teaching

Project-based teaching, rooted in constructivist principles (Gul, 2016), emphasizes student-driven, inquiry-based tasks that simulate real-world challenges—such as producing documentaries, designing cross-cultural campaigns, or curating digital storytelling platforms. Unlike fragmented skill-building exercises, PBL integrates language application with purposeful cultural exploration, theoretically enhancing motivation, collaboration, and problem-solving (Kilpatrick, 1918). For English majors, this approach offers dual benefits: reinforcing linguistic proficiency through authentic use while deepening cultural introspection.

However, integrating PBL into China's English curricula faces two interrelated challenges. First, projects centered on"telling China's story"require students to synthesize complex cultural content—from Confucian philosophy to technological innovation—with persuasive English communication. This demands interdisciplinary collaboration and institutional support, which are often hindered by rigid departmental structures and a lack of teacher training in PBL methodologies. Second, while PBL emphasizes student agency, existing assessment systems remain tethered to standardized metrics, creating misalignment between innovative pedagogy and evaluative practices.

1.2. Research Objectives and Questions

This study addresses the following objectives:

1. To analyze how PBL enhances English majors' linguistic and intercultural competencies in narrating

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China's story.

2. To identify systemic challenges (e.g., curricular fragmentation, assessment misalignment) in implementing culture-focused PBL.

3. To propose a pedagogical framework that harmonizes PBL's collaborative, experiential ethos with China's cultural dissemination objectives.

1.3. Research Gap

Existing research on PBL in language education exhibits three limitations. First, while PBL is well-documented in STEM and general language acquisition (e.g., vocabulary retention), its application to humanities-oriented cultural storytelling—particularly in the Chinese context—remains underexplored. Second, although China prioritizes ideological education and cultural soft power, few studies interrogate how PBL aligns with these goals, often isolating linguistic competence from cultural critique. Third, current literature predominantly frames students as transmitters of cultural knowledge, neglecting PBL's potential to foster critical engagement with global perspectives. This study addresses these gaps by examining PBL as a tool to cultivate linguistically agile, culturally reflective storytellers capable of navigating China's global discourse.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Project-Based Learning (PBL): Foundations and Principles

Over the past two decades, Project-Based Learning (PBL) has emerged as a transformative pedagogical approach, yet its implementation in educational systems globally—and particularly in specialized contexts like China's English education—faces systemic challenges. Grounded in constructivist and experiential learning theories, notably Dewey's "learning by doing" and Vygotsky's social constructivism, PBL shifts the focus from passive knowledge transmission to active, sustained inquiry into real-world problems. At its core, PBL is defined by three principles: ① Authenticity, where projects address complex, meaningful issues aligned with students' lives or societal needs, such as designing solutions for local environmental degradation or documenting cultural heritage; ② Student Agency, which empowers learners to autonomously design, execute, and reflect on projects, transforming them from passive recipients to active co-creators of knowledge; ③ Collaboration, emphasizing structured teamwork, shared responsibility, and negotiated outcomes through communication, distinguishing it from superficial group work.

While PBL theoretically cultivates critical thinking, creativity, and real-world problem-solving, its successful application hinges on overcoming institutional barriers. For instance, interdisciplinary projects require coordination across departments—a challenge akin to the fragmented collaboration observed in vocational school teaching teams—where rigid curricula and exam-centric assessments often hinder flexible, student-driven learning.

2.2 Multiple Intelligences Theory as a Foundation for Differentiated Learning

Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory (MIT) (1983, 1999) redefines intelligence as a pluralistic construct comprising eight distinct cognitive domains: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. This framework rejects monolithic measures of intellect, arguing instead that individuals develop these intelligences unevenly due to cultural,

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contextual, and personal influences.

In practice, MIT advocates for differentiated instruction tailored to learners' intrinsic strengths. For example: Students with strong interpersonal intelligence may excel in collaborative cultural debates, while spatially inclined learners grasp concepts better through visual tools like infographics; Musical intelligence can enhance phonetic awareness in language learning, whereas naturalistic intelligence deepens engagement in projects like documenting regional biodiversity.

However, similar to the challenges faced by vocational schools in fostering symbiotic team cultures, MIT's implementation encounters practical hurdles. Standardized curricula often neglect non-traditional intelligences (e.g., kinesthetic or intrapersonal skills), while teachers may lack training to design inclusive, multi-modal activities—a gap exacerbated by resource constraints and institutional inertia.

2.3 Theoretical Alignment with "Telling China's Story"

The integration of PBL and MIT aligns with China's strategic goals of cultural confidence and global discourse, yet systemic and pedagogical challenges persist. Three dimensions illustrate this alignment:

1. Cultural Authenticity via Contextualized Projects

PBL tasks rooted in local realities—such as "Creating Bilingual Oral Histories of Urban Renewal"—compel students to engage directly with communities, mirroring Zuo Jingni's (2018) emphasis on student-driven knowledge construction. However, like the insufficient symbiotic culture in vocational teaching teams, such projects require cross-departmental collaboration and institutional support, which are often lacking.

2. Rhetorical Adaptability through MIT-Driven Differentiation

MIT's framework enables students to tailor narratives to diverse audiences. For instance, logical-mathematical intelligence sharpens data-driven storytelling (e.g., quantifying poverty alleviation achievements), while musical intelligence integrates traditional arts like Peking opera to evoke emotional resonance. Yet, as Huang Caixia (2019) notes, cultivating such adaptability demands teacher training in interdisciplinary methods—a gap paralleling the experience shortages in vocational education.

3. Ideological Cohesion via Curriculum Integration

Embedding projects within China's "curriculum ideology and politics" mandate harmonizes critical inquiry with socialist values. For example, deconstructing Western media narratives about China requires students to employ logical intelligence (evaluating evidence) and interpersonal intelligence (negotiating cross-cultural perspectives). However, aligning innovative pedagogies like PBL-MIT with standardized ideological frameworks risks superficial implementation unless systemic support—such as teacher autonomy and flexible assessments—is strengthened.

Collectively, while the PBL-MIT framework offers a robust theoretical foundation for "telling China's story," its effectiveness depends on addressing institutional fragmentation and capacity-building gaps, echoing the challenges observed in vocational education's teaching innovation teams.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Research Methods applied in thesis

3.1.1 Literature Research Method

Over the past two decades, literature research has been widely adopted as a foundational methodology

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in educational studies, yet its application in interdisciplinary contexts—particularly those bridging cultural pedagogy and language instruction—faces inherent limitations. In this thesis, the literature research method systematically examines existing scholarly works to contextualize the study within global and domestic academic discourses, focusing on three key areas: project-based learning (PBL), cultural storytelling in language education, and the socio-cultural significance of Sichuan embroidery. By synthesizing prior studies, this approach identifies theoretical frameworks and gaps, such as the underrepresentation of humanities-oriented PBL in China's English education, while grounding the proposed pedagogical innovations in established traditions.

However, two challenges mirror those observed in vocational education's teaching innovation teams. First, the fragmented nature of existing literature—with studies often isolating linguistic competence from cultural critique—complicates the integration of interdisciplinary insights, akin to the low mutual recognition among cross-departmental teams. Second, while policy documents (e.g., China's "National Plan for Cultural Heritage Preservation") provide strategic direction, their practical alignment with classroom-level PBL implementation remains underexplored, reflecting the broader issue of insufficient symbiotic culture between theory and practice. These gaps necessitate a critical, rather than merely descriptive, synthesis to ensure rigor and relevance.

3.1.2 Case Study Method

The case study method, while robust for investigating complex pedagogical phenomena, encounters challenges similar to those faced by vocational schools in operationalizing collaborative innovation. This thesis employs a case study of Sichuan embroidery—a craft deeply intertwined with regional identity and historical symbolism—to explore how PBL enhances English majors' capacity to articulate China's cultural narratives. The method's strength lies in its ability to dissect real-world processes, such as translating embroidery motifs into bilingual storytelling or collaborating with artisans, thereby addressing the "how" and "why" of PBL's effectiveness (Yin, 2018). Yet, three systemic hurdles emerge:

1. Contextual Specificity: While Sichuan embroidery offers rich cultural material, its regional particularity risks limiting the generalizability of findings, mirroring the experience shortages observed in vocational teams when scaling localized innovations.

2. Interdisciplinary Coordination: The case study requires collaboration between language educators, cultural experts, and artisans—a process hindered by the same low collaborative innovation capacity seen in cross-departmental vocational teams.

3. Resource Intensity: Detailed data collection (e.g., interviews, artifact analysis) demands significant institutional support, echoing the resource constraints that impede symbiotic culture-building in vocational education.

Despite these challenges, the case study aligns with China's strategic emphasis on culturally grounded pedagogy. By documenting students' transformative journeys from passive learners to active ambassadors, the method provides actionable insights for aligning localized projects, like Sichuan embroidery, with national initiatives such as "telling China's story well."Its emphasis on triangulation (e.g., combining classroom observations, student portfolios, and artisan interviews) ensures methodological rigor while addressing the vocational education sector's call for practical, context-specific solutions.

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3.1.3 Interview

Interviews are employed in this study to capture participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and challenges in navigating cultural storytelling through Sichuan embroidery. As a qualitative tool, interviews provide depth by revealing how students negotiate linguistic and cultural complexities, articulate identity shifts, and reflect on collaborative learning. By engaging directly with students, instructors, and artisans, this method uncovers nuanced insights into PBL's transformative potential, complementing observational and artifact data to triangulate findings and enrich understanding of pedagogical effectiveness in fostering global cultural ambassadors.

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1. Case Selection

Sichuan embroidery, a 2,000-year-old intangible cultural heritage, serves as an exemplary case for studying project-based learning (PBL) in China's storytelling due to its profound cultural, pedagogical, and strategic relevance. Its intricate motifs (e.g., pandas symbolizing harmony, lotus flowers representing purity) and traditional techniques encapsulate China's philosophical values, historical continuity, and regional identity, offering multilayered narratives that bridge past and present. This aligns with national imperatives like "telling China's story well" and fostering cultural confidence, as students engage with themes of heritage preservation and modernization—such as its role in rural revitalization or sustainable silk production. The craft's interdisciplinary nature—spanning art, history, ecology, and linguistics—enables PBL's holistic approach, challenging learners to explore connections between Silk Road trade, ecological wisdom, and bilingual narrative design.Its tactile, visual elements (e.g., hands-on stitching, artifact analysis) foster active engagement, critical for PBL's experiential learning ethos, while its regional specificity (Sichuan Province) provides a focused yet resonant cultural lens.

Furthermore, Sichuan embroidery's global-local duality—distinctly Chinese yet universally relatable through themes like craftsmanship and sustainability—equips students to practice audience adaptation, balancing cultural authenticity with cross-cultural appeal. By transforming abstract ideological goals into tangible projects (e.g., documentaries, interactive exhibits), it empowers learners to articulate China's narratives with nuance and creativity. Thus, Sichuan embroidery acts as a microcosm of China's macro-narratives, making it an ideal pedagogical tool to cultivate linguistically adept, culturally confident ambassadors capable of navigating global-local dialogues in the 21st century.

3.2.2 Structure and Implementation

The project spanned 4 weeks (Weeks 7–10 of a 16-week semester) and was structured into three phases:

Phase 1: Immersion and Ideation (Week 7)focused on immersing students in Sichuan embroidery's cultural context and inspiring project ideas. Activities included a cultural workshop led by a master embroiderer, who demonstrated techniques and explained symbolic motifs like pandas (harmony) and peonies (prosperity). Students examined historical embroidery artifacts in small groups, discussing their socio-cultural significance, and brainstormed storytelling formats tailored to specific audiences, such as podcasts for foreign tourists.

Phase 2: Fieldwork and Creation (Weeks 8–9) aimed to facilitate hands-on engagement with cultural content and iterative project development. Students conducted a day-long field visit to a Chengdu embroidery workshop, interviewing artisans about adapting traditional designs for modern audiences and documenting

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processes through photos and videos. Teams then crafted bilingual narratives linking embroidery to broader Chinese values, such as resilience in Sichuan's post-earthquake revival, and participated in peer workshops to critique drafts using guided questions (e.g., cross-cultural resonance of narratives).

Phase 3: Presentation and Reflection (Week 10) centered on showcasing final outputs and reflecting on the learning journey. Students presented projects—such as a bilingual documentary on embroidery's role in rural women's empowerment.

3.3 Data Collection

Qualitative data were collected through three primary methods, each designed to capture distinct dimensions of the project-based learning experience. 1). Participant observation was utilized to document real-time interactions, decision-making processes, and group dynamics. The instructor-researcher maintained a reflexive journal, recording instances such as how students negotiated roles (e.g., resolving conflicts over leadership) and moments of cultural insight (e.g., recognizing embroidery's connection to Daoist philosophy). Non-participant observers, including two graduate assistants, supplemented this by documenting students' body language and engagement levels during fieldwork, ensuring a comprehensive view of behavioral and emotional responses. 2) Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore students' perceptions of how the project influenced their cultural and linguistic growth. Post-project interviews lasting 30–45 minutes were held with all 14 participants, featuring questions such as, "How did this project change your understanding of 'telling China's story'?" and "What was most challenging about translating cultural concepts into English?" To triangulate perspectives, artisans and instructors were also interviewed, adding depth to the analysis of pedagogical and cultural outcomes. 3) Artifact analysis focused on evaluating how students' cultural and linguistic competencies materialized in their final outputs. All four group projects were collected and examined, with emphasis on two criteria: cultural depth (e.g., accuracy in representing embroidery's historical and symbolic context) and linguistic creativity (e.g., use of metaphor, narrative structure, and audience adaptation in bilingual storytelling). This method provided tangible evidence of learning outcomes, bridging subjective experiences with objective project quality.

3.4 Data Analysis

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis framework, beginning with familiarization, where researchers immersed themselves in the data through repeated reading and viewing of interview transcripts, reflective journals, and multimedia artifacts to identify patterns and contextual nuances. This was followed by initial coding, where descriptive labels (e.g., "translation struggles" for linguistic challenges or "cultural pride" for identity shifts) were systematically assigned to segments of data. Next, codes were clustered into broader themes during theme development, such as "Negotiating Cultural Authenticity," which encapsulated tensions between preserving traditional symbolism and adapting narratives for global audiences. Themes were then refined during theme review to ensure internal coherence and alignment with research questions, eliminating redundancies or weakly supported categories. In theme definition, the core essence of each theme was articulated—for instance, defining "Embodied Learning Through Craft" as the tactile connection between stitching practices and cultural empathy. Finally, during report writing, themes were woven into a narrative enriched with vivid examples (e.g., student quotes on reconciling Daoist motifs with English idioms) and cross-referenced with artifact evidence (e.g., bilingual documentaries) to ensure analytical rigor and depth, thereby constructing a holistic understanding of PBL's

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impact on cultural storytelling.

4. Finding and Results

This chapter presents the findings from the implementation of the project-based learning (PBL) framework in the Sichuan embroidery project, focusing on how the approach enhanced students' linguistic and cultural competencies in the context of "telling China's story." The results are organized into three main themes: Cultural Authenticity, Linguistic Proficiency, and Collaborative Learning Experiences. Each theme reflects the multifaceted outcomes of the PBL approach and is supported by qualitative data collected from participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and artifact analysis.

4.1 Cultural Authenticity

One of the most significant findings of this study is the deepened understanding of cultural authenticity among students during the project. Participants reported that engaging with Sichuan embroidery allowed them to connect with their cultural heritage in a meaningful way.

4.1.1 Engaging with Cultural Heritage

The Sichuan embroidery project transformed students into active co-creators of cultural narratives through immersive engagement with heritage. Interactions with master embroiderers and historical artifacts—such as motifs like the lotus (purity) and yin-yang designs—revealed the craft's philosophical roots, prompting critical inquiry into its socio-cultural contexts. Fieldwork in Beichuan, Mianyang workshops deepened this connection, as students documented artisans' efforts to preserve traditions amid modernization.

One participant noted, "Heritage isn't static—it adapts yet stays rooted," inspiring projects like a bilingual documentary on rural women using embroidery to rebuild communities post-earthquake, blending resilience with collective memory.

Students navigated cultural mediation challenges, such as translating "蜀 绣" (Shu embroidery). A team chose "Shu" over "Sichuan" to honor regional identity, supplementing it with a glossary to balance authenticity and accessibility.

Qiang embroidery, a millennium-old intangible cultural heritage of the Qiang people, weaves the ethnic group's spiritual codes through unique totemic symbols and nature-inspired narratives. Among these, the goat totem stands as one of the most iconic cultural emblems. Hands-on stitching fostered embodied learning: "Stitching a peony made me feel part of its story," wrote a student, reflecting a shift from passive knowledge to personal resonance.

Another exemplary work is the "People of the White Clouds" series from Beichuan Qiang Autonomous County. These pieces feature "Qiang Villages in the Clouds" patterns, embroidered with silver threads on indigo-dyed fabric, where the silhouettes of ancient watchtowers merge with layered cloudscapes. The artisans employ "raised-stitch silver pressing" techniques, creating clouds that shift between solidity and ethereality under light, symbolizing the Qiang's cultural resilience amid Han-Tibetan exchanges.

By merging tactile creation with critical reflection, the project cultivated cultural pride and agency, aligning with China's goal of nurturing ambassadors who articulate heritage as dynamic, lived experience rather than static history. This approach empowered students to bridge tradition and modernity, framing cultural storytelling as both a responsibility and an act of identity.

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4.1.2 Strengthening Understanding and Comprehension of Chinese Culture

The project significantly deepened students' comprehension of Chinese culture by fostering critical analysis of its multidimensionality. Through researching Sichuan embroidery's symbolic motifs—such as the phoenix (renewal) and koi fish (perseverance)—students moved beyond superficial interpretations to explore their historical, philosophical, and socio-economic contexts. For example, a group investigating peony designs linked them not only to Tang Dynasty aesthetics but also to contemporary discourses on ecological sustainability, noting how traditional silk dyeing techniques utilize natural pigments. This interdisciplinary approach enabled learners to recognize culture as a dynamic interplay of values, practices, and adaptations.

Field interviews with artisans further enriched their understanding, revealing how generational knowledge transfer intersects with modern challenges like e-commerce integration. "Before, I saw culture as fixed traditions," one student remarked, "but hearing artisans discuss balancing innovation with heritage taught me it's a living dialogue."

Additionally, translating culturally embedded concepts (e.g., " 以绣养心 ," using embroidery to nourish the soul) pushed students to grapple with untranslatable nuances, fostering meta-cultural awareness.

4.2 Linguistic Proficiency

The PBL approach significantly enhanced students' linguistic proficiency, particularly in terms of discourse strategies and creative language use.

4.2.1 Development of Discourse Strategies

The project-based learning (PBL) framework significantly enhanced students' ability to employ sophisticated discourse strategies, enabling them to structure narratives that balance cultural specificity with cross-cultural accessibility. Immersion in Sichuan embroidery's cultural context (Phase 1) required students to analyze audience needs and adapt rhetorical approaches accordingly. For instance, teams designing short videos for foreign tourists prioritized clarity and relatability, framing embroidery motifs like pandas as symbols of harmony rather than mere decorative art. Conversely, groups creating guides for college students employed storytelling techniques such as allegory, linking the patience of stitching to broader life lessons. This audience-centric approach honed their ability to code-switch—shifting between explanatory, persuasive, and descriptive registers—while maintaining narrative coherence. Fieldwork (Phase 2) further refined their strategic use of evidence. When documenting rural artisans' revival efforts, students interwove quantitative data (e.g., rising e-commerce sales) with qualitative testimonials, mastering the interplay of logos and pathos to bolster credibility. One participant noted, "I learned to 'show, not tell'—using artisans' voices to convey resilience instead of just stating it."

The iterative drafting process, coupled with peer workshops, cultivated metacognitive awareness of discourse construction. Students revised narratives based on feedback, recognizing how structural choices—such as opening with a personal anecdote versus a historical fact—shaped engagement. For example, a team initially began their documentary with a chronological history of embroidery but reorganized it around a central theme (yin-yang balance) after peers found the original structure disjointed. Translating culturally embedded concepts also demanded strategic compromises. When rendering " 以绣养心 " (using embroidery to nourish the soul), a group opted for the metaphor "stitching mindfulness" to approximate the phrase's spiritual nuance, supplementing it with a visual of meditative stitching practices. Such decisions

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underscored their growing ability to negotiate linguistic and cultural gaps through creative hybridization. By the presentation phase (Phase 3), students demonstrated heightened rhetorical agility, seamlessly integrating multimodal elements (e.g., embroidery visuals, ambient folk music) to reinforce verbal narratives. These strategies, rooted in PBL's emphasis on real-world application, equipped learners to craft compelling, audience-tailored discourses—a critical skill for bridging China's cultural narratives with global interlocutors.

4.2.2 Linguistic Creativity and Adaptation

The project fostered linguistic creativity as students navigated the dual demands of cultural fidelity and cross-cultural communication, devising innovative strategies to adapt culturally specific concepts into English. Confronted with untranslatable terms like "阴阳平衡" (yīn-yáng balance), learners employed metaphorical approximations, such as "threaded harmony," to convey the interplay of opposing forces in embroidery design. Others coined neologisms, like "silk-spun resilience," to encapsulate the craft's role in post-disaster recovery, blending material and symbolic meanings. This creativity extended to narrative styles: one team reimagined a traditional folktale about embroidery's origins as a graphic novel, using onomatopoeic captions (e.g., "whisper-thread" for delicate stitching sounds) to evoke sensory immersion. Students also leveraged multimodal resources, pairing bilingual scripts with visual annotations—such as QR codes linking to videos of artisans explaining motifs—to bypass linguistic limitations. Challenges in conveying cultural nuances prompted reflective problem-solving: when translating "锦绣前程" (jǐnxiù qiánchéng, a proverb linking embroidery to a bright future), a group opted for the phrase "a tapestry of possibilities," embedding it within a narrative about sustainable craftsmanship to preserve its aspirational essence. Such adaptations required not only lexical flexibility but also an understanding of how cultural metaphors resonate differently across audiences. Interviews revealed heightened metalinguistic awareness, with one student noting, "I stopped translating word-for-word and started reimagining ideas." This shift underscores PBL's role in nurturing inventive language use, empowering students to transcend literal translation and craft narratives that honor cultural depth while engaging global listeners—a vital competency for China's cultural ambassadors.

4.3 Collaborative Learning Experiences

The project-based learning (PBL) framework fostered dynamic collaboration, transforming students into interdependent teams that navigated cultural and linguistic challenges collectively. Group tasks—such as co-designing bilingual documentaries or curating interactive exhibits—required negotiation of roles, blending diverse intelligences (e.g., spatially gifted students mapping motifs, linguistically strong peers refining narratives). Conflicts, like disagreements over translating "蜀绣" (Shu embroidery), became opportunities for democratic problem-solving: one team held a vote after debating regional identity versus global accessibility, later reflecting that "compromise felt like stitching—different threads creating one piece." Peer workshops in Phase 2 further strengthened interdependence, as groups critiqued drafts using guided rubrics, with one student noting, "Feedback wasn't about right or wrong, but how to weave ideas better."

Collaboration extended beyond classmates: fieldwork interviews with artisans and cross-cultural comparisons required empathy and active listening, deepening students' intercultural negotiation skills. Notably, less confident learners reported feeling "carried by the group's energy," while dominant members learned to "step back and trust others' expertise." These interactions cultivated a shared ownership of outcomes, evident in final presentations where teams highlighted collective contributions. By merging MIT's interpersonal intelligence with PBL's collaborative ethos, the project not only enhanced teamwork but also

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modeled the pluralistic, dialogue-driven communication essential to China's global storytelling mission.

5. Conclusion

This study underscores the transformative potential of project-based learning (PBL) in redefining English education for China's future cultural ambassadors. By centering on Sichuan embroidery—a craft steeped in historical symbolism and contemporary relevance—the PBL framework enabled students to transcend traditional language pedagogy, merging linguistic skill development with profound cultural engagement. Through immersive activities like artifact analysis, fieldwork with artisans, and bilingual storytelling, learners transitioned from passive recipients of knowledge to active co-creators of China's narratives. The project's emphasis on cultural authenticity compelled students to grapple with the duality of heritage preservation and modernization, as seen in their documentation of rural revitalization efforts or sustainable silk practices. Simultaneously, challenges such as translating " 阴阳平衡 " (yīn-yáng balance) into culturally resonant English phrases fostered linguistic creativity, pushing learners to devise metaphors like "threaded harmony" or multimodal solutions like QR-linked artisan videos. These experiences not only deepened their understanding of Chinese philosophy and aesthetics but also cultivated the rhetorical agility needed to articulate these concepts to global audiences. By aligning with China's mandate to "tell China's story well," the PBL approach demonstrated how language education can evolve beyond grammar mastery to nurture culturally confident communicators capable of bridging local traditions with universal themes like sustainability and resilience.

The collaborative nature of PBL further emerged as a cornerstone of its success, fostering interdisciplinary teamwork and intercultural negotiation skills essential for global engagement. Group projects, such as co-creating documentaries or interactive exhibits, required students to synthesize diverse intelligences—spatially inclined members mapped motifs, while linguistically gifted peers refined narratives—mirroring the pluralistic demands of real-world communication. Conflicts, such as debates over translating " 蜀绣 " (Shu embroidery), became pedagogical opportunities, encouraging democratic problem-solving and metacognitive reflection. One team's realization that "compromise felt like stitching—different threads creating one piece" epitomized how collaboration mirrored the very cultural values they sought to convey. Beyond classroom dynamics, interactions with artisans and cross-cultural comparisons deepened empathy and active listening, skills critical for navigating global dialogues. Notably, the project's structure mitigated traditional hierarchies: less confident students reported feeling "carried by the group's energy," while dominant members learned to "trust others' expertise." This collective ownership of outcomes, evident in final presentations highlighting shared contributions, reinforced the synergy between PBL's collaborative ethos and China's vision of harmonious, dialogue-driven cultural diplomacy.

Ultimately, this thesis positions PBL as a replicable model for humanities-oriented language education, addressing critical gaps in current pedagogy. By demonstrating how linguistic and cultural competencies can be synergistically developed, the study challenges exam-centric models that isolate language skills from ideological and ethical frameworks. The integration of Sichuan embroidery into the curriculum not only aligned with national strategies like the "Belt and Road" initiative but also provided actionable insights for educators seeking to balance ideological cohesion with critical thinking. Future research could explore longitudinal impacts, such as how PBL-trained students navigate professional cross-cultural roles, or how

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similar frameworks might adapt to other regional crafts or global contexts. Moreover, the emphasis on metacultural awareness—students' ability to critically reflect on cultural representation—offers a counterpoint to passive knowledge transmission, advocating for education that empowers learners to reinterpret and reimagine heritage. In an era where China's global narrative is both contested and vital, this study affirms that equipping students to live and narrate their culture through inquiry-driven, collaborative projects is not merely pedagogical innovation but a strategic imperative. By transforming classrooms into spaces where language, culture, and identity dynamically converge, PBL cultivates ambassadors who can articulate China's story with authenticity, creativity, and resonance—a necessity for fostering mutual understanding in an interconnected yet fragmented world.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to acknowledge Professor Shi Zhenggang for his expert guidance and unwavering support throughout this research. Special gratitude is extended to Associate Professor Zhou Zhongjie for his insightful methodological direction. The active participation of the 2021 Innovative English Major Class from the School of Culture and Education provided invaluable empirical data. The author also deeply appreciates the emotional and logistical support from family members, which sustained this project through its challenges. No financial conflicts of interest influenced the outcomes of this study.

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