

## **A Case Study of Teaching Background Knowledge in *College-English* Classes in China : The Enlightenment of British Architectural Aesthetics**

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### **Abstract**

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*Cultural background knowledge of the target countries is of great significance to second language acquisition. In our teaching practice, some basic knowledge of British architectural aesthetics is introduced to Chinese students. Thus, we intend to study how to effectively teach cultural background knowledge of the target countries in College-English classes in China. Since the British architectural aesthetics is a huge topic, Augustus Pugin and his masterpieces are chosen to be the main object of this study.*

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**Keywords:** background knowledge, English Teaching

### **1. Purpose of the research**

It is self-evident that the cultural background knowledge of the target countries is of great significance to second language acquisition. Language is an important embodiment of cultural experience, while culture is the accumulation of a nation's overall social life. Language roots in culture, and culture depends on language for innovation and development. In the process of second language acquisition, it is a short-sighted behavior to only focus on learning the language itself and ignore the learning of the culture it relies on. Unfortunately, many of Chinese college students do not realize the significance of this problem. They do not have enough the background knowledge of English-speaking countries and make few efforts on it in the process of English learning. Thus, many Chinese English teachers asked this question: "how to teach cultural background knowledge of western countries in *College-English* Classes in China?" The purpose of this research is to answer this question.

### **2. The Enlightenment of British Architectural Aesthetics**

The background knowledge involved includes the knowledge of history, politics, literature and other dimensions of the target countries. Among them, the background knowledge of architectural aesthetics is one of the most rarely covered ones. "The enlightenment of British architectural aesthetics" is used as a particular example to study how to effectively teach cultural background knowledge of the target countries in *College-English* classes in China. Taken into consideration the immensity of aesthetics of British architecture, Augustus Pugin and his masterpieces are chosen to be the main object of this study. For instance, we focused on the art appreciation of Elizabeth Tower, or the well-known "Big Ben". Through the art appreciation of the famous tower, we are able to explore Augustus Pugin's Gothic architectural aesthetics, the cultural core of the ancient British architecture, and study how British culture, in turn, affects the aesthetic ideas of British architects.

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### 3. Research process

**3.1 Students participants:** Recruiting interested students through the 2023 URT (*Undergraduate Research Training Program*) of BIPT (*Beijing Institute of Petrochemical Technology*). The students are supposed to be interested in western culture, have certain language proficiency and are willing to learn knowledge beyond textbooks. After a serious and careful selective process, LI tian cheng shuo, CHEN li tian, LE min, WANG ming han and WANG ke yan, five students excel and beat dozens of other candidates, and participated in this program. LI tian cheng shuo is chosen as the leader of the student team.

**3.2 Data collection:** Most of the data involved in this study are original English literature<sup>1</sup> and BBC videos<sup>2</sup> without Chinese subtitles, which need to be carefully read or watched by the participants.

**3.3 Summary and refining of materials:** Student participants have a preliminary understanding of Augustus Pugin's architectural aesthetics by collecting, reading and regulating the written materials and video materials involved in the project. They need to summarize and refine the research contents.

**3.4 Solving problems:** Student participants are to answer the following questions after their previous hard work.

- ☐ What are the representative buildings or architectural interiors of Augustus Pugin?
- ☐ What architectural theory works has Augustus Pugin written? What is his main point of view?
- ☐ What historical, religious and cultural artistic influences has Augustus Pugin received?
- ☐ What impact does Augustus Pugin's architectural aesthetics have on the future market?

### 4. Conclusion of the research

Architectural aesthetics is an important branch of artistic aesthetics. Architecture is the product of the intersection of social economy, technology, religion, psychology, culture and various arts. The value of architecture includes its practical value and spiritual value. The spiritual value of architecture is more about the multiple projections of religion, psychology, culture and art. By studying Augustus Pugin's Gothic architectural aesthetics, for example, the students can better understand the culture and religion of England in the 19th century. More importantly, this study helps to improve the aesthetic ability of college students, educate them from intelligence, emotion, quality and other aspects, and promote the all-round and healthy development of their personalities. Just like Vissarion Grigoryevich Belinsky(1811-1848), a Russian literary critic once said: "Beauty is the sister of morality". This aesthetic study helps "to enlighten the mind with beauty and improve the ethical standard with beauty." In addition, in the process of this research, students' comprehensive scientific research ability and practical English application ability (such as data search, sorting, induction and refining) are improved. The research goal has been basically achieved, according to the participants of the program. Further studies will be made and the opportunities for researchers to contribute to this issue are many.

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<sup>1</sup>Phoebe B. Stanton "Pugin, Augustus Welby Northmore" in *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, Adolf K. Placzek, ed., vol. 3, New York - London, 1982, pp. 484-497.

<sup>2</sup>[https://m.bilibili.com/video/BV1VW41157pn?is\\_story\\_h5=false&p=1&share\\_from=ugc&share\\_medium=android&share\\_plat=android&share\\_session\\_id=cb2358af-e414-452a-a435-462b8819a5a4&share\\_source=WEIXIN&share\\_tag=s\\_i&timestamp=1667351686&unique\\_k=NC3IeAX](https://m.bilibili.com/video/BV1VW41157pn?is_story_h5=false&p=1&share_from=ugc&share_medium=android&share_plat=android&share_session_id=cb2358af-e414-452a-a435-462b8819a5a4&share_source=WEIXIN&share_tag=s_i&timestamp=1667351686&unique_k=NC3IeAX)