

Blending the Old and the New: A Conceptual Integration Analysis of Cultural Transmission in English-Media-Making Projects

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Abstract: Amidst national initiatives advocating for the "creative transformation and innovative development" of cultural heritage in China, this study investigates an innovative pedagogical model that incorporates local folk culture—the Zhanjiang Nianli Festival—into tertiary-level English instruction. Within a project-based learning framework, university students were engaged in producing original multimodal digital media in English, designed to introduce the Nianli Festival to global audiences. Grounded in Fauconnier and Turner's conceptual integration theory, this research adopts a case study methodology centered on multimodal artifacts to examine student-generated videos and digital posters. The analysis elucidates the underlying cognitive-semiotic processes involved in their cross-cultural mediation. Findings indicate that students skillfully blended elements from a "traditional Nianli space" with those from a "modern English-media space," creating novel conceptual blends that reinterpreted ritual ceremonies as immersive cultural journeys and communal feasts as global food carnivals. This blending process not only promoted meaningful English language use but also functioned as an effective mechanism for enacting "dual innovation" in cultural pedagogy. The study affirms the potential of such an approach to position students as active agents of cultural reinterpretation and transmission, while providing a transferable model for language educators throughout the Asia-Pacific region aiming to integrate local heritage with contemporary competencies.

Keywords: Conceptual Integration; Cultural Transmission; English Language Teaching; Multimodal Discourse; Project-based Learning

1. Introduction

Across the rapidly developing societies of the Asia-Pacific region, a recurring challenge involves reconciling the preservation of intangible cultural heritage with the pressures of an increasingly globalized and digital world. Nowhere is this tension more pronounced than within educational systems, where language teaching often serves as a primary site of negotiation between local culture and global communication. In China, this challenge has been formally addressed through the national policy of "dual innovation", which promotes the "creative transformation and innovative development" of traditional culture. Despite the clear directive offered by this policy, its practical application in educational settings—particularly in foreign language instruction—remains inadequately explored.

Conventional approaches to teaching culture in English language teaching (ELT) frequently treat cultural content as a static body of knowledge to be transmitted—comprising facts, dates, and descriptive details—rather than as a living, dynamic practice that demands active engagement and reinterpretation [1]. This pedagogical orientation creates a disconnect: while students may learn about their cultural heritage in English, they often lack the skills to actively communicate, critically evaluate, and creatively reinvent it for contemporary global audiences.

This study addresses this gap through a case study of a project-based learning (PBL) initiative in a Chinese university context. Within this initiative, students developed English-language digital media projects to present the Zhanjiang Nianli Festival—a vibrant local tradition—to international audiences. We contend that this pedagogical process transcends mere translation, representing instead a form of conceptual blending: a complex cognitive operation in which elements from distinct mental spaces are integrated to generate new

meanings [2].

Our investigation is guided by the following research questions:

How do students conceptually integrate elements from traditional Nianli culture and modern English-media discourses in their multimodal projects?

In what ways does this blending process exemplify the principles of "creative transformation and innovative development"?

What broader implications can be drawn for designing culturally sustainable English language pedagogy in the Asia-Pacific context?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Cultural Heritage in Language Education

The integration of local cultural content into English Language Teaching (ELT) has been a persistent theme in pedagogical discourse, widely advocated as a means to foster intrinsic learner motivation, strengthen cultural identity, and develop critical thinking skills. Proponents argue that such an approach can counteract the hegemony of Western-centric cultural models often embedded in global textbooks, thereby promoting a more equitable and culturally responsive language education. This aligns with the broader goal of intercultural communicative competence, where learners are equipped not only to communicate information but also to mediate between cultures [3].

In the specific context of China, this pedagogical orientation resonates strongly with the national discourse on "cultural confidence" and the policy directive of "dual innovation", which calls for the "creative transformation and innovative development" of traditional culture [4]. This policy framework emphasizes the need to revitalize heritage by making it relevant to contemporary society and global audiences, thus providing a clear socio-political imperative for educational practices that move beyond preservation towards active reinterpretation.

However, despite strong theoretical and policy support, the practical implementation of culture in ELT often remains superficial and reductive. A common approach treats cultural heritage as a static body of factual knowledge to be transmitted—comprising dates, historical events, and descriptions of customs—rather than as a living, dynamic, and often contested practice that requires engagement, interpretation, and negotiation. This leads to a pedagogical gap

where students may learn about their own culture in English but do not learn how to actively communicate, critically evaluate, and creatively reinvent it for contemporary global audiences. Consequently, there is a growing and urgent need for pedagogies that reposition students: instead of being passive recipients of cultural knowledge, students should be empowered as active, critical agents in its ongoing reproduction, negotiation, and renewal [5]. This shift necessitates moving beyond informational content to focus on the processes of cultural meaning-making, a gap which the present study addresses through its project-based, multimodal framework.

2.2 Conceptual Integration Theory

Conceptual Integration Theory (CIT), also known as blending theory, provides a powerful framework for understanding the fundamental cognitive operations that underpin how humans combine ideas, experiences, and models from different domains to create new meaning. At the core of CIT is the "conceptual integration network," a model that typically involves at least four interconnected mental spaces.

First, there are two or more input spaces that supply distinct elements and structural relations from separate conceptual domains. Second, a generic space captures the shared, abstract commonalities that allow the inputs to be aligned and connected. The most critical component is the blended space, where selected elements from the input spaces are projected and compositionally combined—for instance, projecting the Nianli's communal feast onto a global 'food carnival' frame. Through processes of completion (bringing additional background knowledge to the blend) and elaboration (mentally simulating the blend), this fusion gives rise to emergent meaning—novel structure, insights, and emotional resonances that were not present in any of the original inputs, such as the new conceptualization of a sacred ritual as an immersive cultural journey.

CIT has been productively applied to analyze a wide spectrum of phenomena, from the comprehension of everyday metaphors and analogies to the creative leaps in artistic expression and scientific discovery [6]. However, its application to analyze specific pedagogical practices, particularly in the context of cultural education within foreign language classrooms, remains relatively novel and under-explored.

In the context of this study, CIT offers a granular and dynamic lens to examine the cognitive and semiotic work students perform. More specifically, it serves as an analytical lens uniquely suited to uncovering the processes of learning and creative thinking, making visible how students actively construct new understandings through conceptual blending rather than merely reproducing cultural content [7]. It allows us to move beyond describing their multimedia products as mere translations, and instead, to model the intricate mental processes they engage in when reconciling the complex, often sacred, elements of a local tradition like the Nianli Festival with the conventions and communicative demands of modern global media forms. To visualize this theoretical framework as applied to our data, Figure 1 illustrates a typical conceptual integration network derived from the students' projects, mapping how elements from traditional culture and contemporary media were selectively blended.

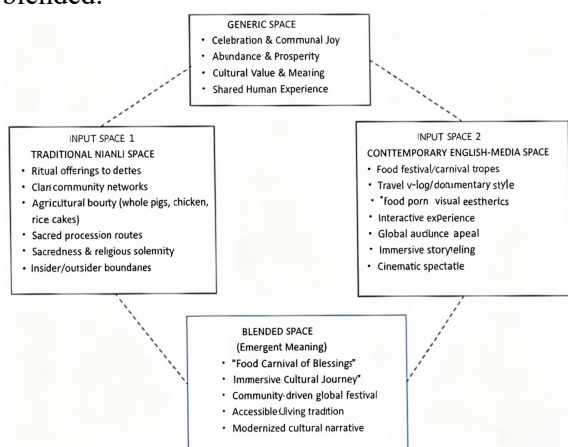


Figure 1. A Conceptual Integration Network Modeling the Blending of Traditional Nianli Elements with Contemporary Media Discourses in Student Projects.

This conceptual integration network illustrates the cognitive blending process observed in students' multimedia projects. The Generic Space contains the abstract commonalities that enable connection between the two input spaces, including fundamental human experiences of celebration, abundance, and cultural meaning-making. The Traditional Nianli Space (Input Space 1) comprises elements from the authentic cultural practice: sacred rituals, community structures, agricultural symbolism, and clear spiritual boundaries. The Contemporary English-Media Space (Input Space 2) contains elements from modern digital

communication: food festival frameworks, immersive media conventions, and global engagement strategies.

Through selective projection, students mapped compatible elements from both spaces into the Blended Space, creating novel emergent meanings that did not exist in either original space. The sacred "bai zhong" ritual became a "Food Carnival of Blessings," while the solemn "you shen" procession transformed into an "Immersive Cultural Journey." This blending process exemplifies the "creative transformation" called for by China's dual innovation policy, maintaining core cultural values while adapting their expression for contemporary global audiences. By mapping these conceptual blends, we can elucidate the cognitive mechanisms through which students achieve meaningful cultural innovation in their multimedia projects.

2.3 Multimodality and Project-Based Learning

In today's digital ecology, communication is inherently and fundamentally multimodal. Meaning is rarely constructed through language alone but is instead realized through the complex interplay and integration of various semiotic resources such as language, image, sound, gesture, and spatial composition [8]. This shift necessitates the development of multimodal literacies, where learners become adept at both critically reading and creatively producing texts that traverse these multiple modes.

Project-based learning (PBL) emerges as a pedagogical approach that is a natural fit for this endeavor. By engaging students in sustained, collaborative, and authentic inquiry around a complex question or problem, PBL creates a meaningful context where the orchestration of multiple modes is not an add-on but a fundamental requirement for success. However, implementing PBL in multimodal contexts presents notable challenges, including the significant time investment required from both instructors and students, the cognitive load associated with mastering digital tools, and the risk of technical demands overshadowing core learning objectives [9].

When students are tasked with producing a digital video or an infographic, they are compelled to move beyond verbatim translation. They must make deliberate design choices: selecting images that visually echo or enhance

their verbal message, using music to evoke specific emotions, employing color and layout to establish hierarchy and tone, and integrating narration with moving images to construct a compelling narrative. This process of multimodal design is, at its core, an act of semiotic transformation and recombination.

This study sits precisely at the intersection of these two domains—multimodality and PBL. We contend that the multimodal artifacts students create within a PBL framework are external manifestations of internal cognitive processes. Therefore, by employing Conceptual Integration Theory (CIT) to analyze these rich, multimodal products, we can illuminate the otherwise hidden cognitive dimensions of cultural learning. The videos and posters become tangible data through which we can trace how students selectively project, compress, and blend elements from traditional culture and modern media discourses to generate emergent meanings, thereby offering a novel methodological lens for understanding the intricacies of cultural transmission in the digital age [10].

It is important to acknowledge that while the PBL approach yielded significant learning outcomes, its implementation required careful consideration of several challenges. The substantial time commitment and technical demands noted earlier could potentially hinder the effectiveness of such projects. In the present study, these challenges were mitigated through strategic scaffolding: the project was systematically integrated into the course timeline, targeted workshops were provided to build essential technical skills, and collaborative group work helped distribute both cognitive and technical loads. These measures ensured that students could focus on the core semiotic and cognitive processes of cultural translation, rather than being overwhelmed by logistical or technical complexities. The instructor's role accordingly shifted from knowledge-deliverer to facilitator, providing crucial support throughout the blending process. This balanced approach demonstrates that with appropriate institutional and pedagogical support, the significant benefits of multimodal PBL for cultural learning can be realized without being compromised by its inherent implementation challenges.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study

design to investigate the processes and outcomes of a pedagogical intervention that integrated local cultural heritage into English language education. The research was conducted within an authentic classroom setting, focusing on the multimodal artifacts produced by students and the cognitive processes underlying their creation. The following sections detail the research context, participants, pedagogical intervention, data collection procedures, and analytical methods that constituted the methodological framework of this inquiry.

3.1 Research Context and Participants

This study was conducted within a compulsory "Overview of Chinese Culture" course at a university in Zhanjiang, China. The participants consisted of 35 third-year undergraduate English majors (aged 20-22), all of whom had grown up in Zhanjiang or surrounding regions and possessed firsthand experience with the Nianli Festival.

Regarding language proficiency, all participants had passed the Test for English Majors-Band 4 (TEM-4), with score distribution as follows: 40% (n=14) achieved scores in the "good" range (70-79), 45% (n=16) in the "pass" range (60-69), and 15% (n=5) attained "excellent" scores (80+). This distribution indicates that the cohort possessed adequate to strong English proficiency for undertaking multimedia projects targeting international audiences.

In terms of digital competencies, a pre-project survey revealed three distinct experience levels: approximately 20% (n=7) reported substantial prior experience with video editing software (e.g., Premiere Pro, Final Cut Pro) and had completed at least one sophisticated digital storytelling project; 40% (n=14) possessed basic skills in PowerPoint and simple editing tools but limited experience with integrated multimedia production; the remaining 40% (n=14) reported minimal exposure to digital content creation beyond basic document processing.

To address this heterogeneous skill distribution, several scaffolding measures were implemented. First, students were strategically grouped to ensure a mix of proficiency levels in each team, facilitating peer mentoring. This deliberate grouping strategy directly influenced the nature and quality of the final multimedia artifacts, as teams with varied composition leveraged their diverse strengths—combining stronger English scripting and narration with more advanced

technical execution. Second, a series of targeted workshops was provided, covering fundamental video editing (using user-friendly platforms like CapCut and iMovie), infographic design principles (utilizing Canva), and digital storytelling techniques [11]. Third, technical support sessions were scheduled throughout the four-week project duration, allowing groups to consult with teaching assistants on specific technical challenges. These support structures enabled all participants to successfully complete the project requirements while developing their digital literacies.

The four-week PBL module, entitled "Promoting Nianli to the World," served as the culminating project for the semester, requiring students to synthesize their cultural knowledge, language skills, and emerging digital literacies to create compelling English-language media presentations about this traditional festival.

3.2 Pedagogical Intervention and Data Collection

The PBL module required students, working in small groups, to create a digital media product in English that would explain and promote the Nianli Festival to non-Chinese audiences. The instructor provided background materials on the festival and workshops on digital storytelling and multimodal design, but gave students significant creative freedom.

The primary data for this qualitative case study are the multimodal artifacts produced by the students:

Five short promotional videos (2-3 minutes each), featuring student narration, subtitles, footage from local Nianli celebrations, and music.

Twelve digital infographic posters, designed using online tools, combining English text, photographs, icons, and graphical elements.

3.3 Data Analysis

The analysis followed a systematic two-stage process, employing both multimodal discourse analysis and conceptual integration network mapping to ensure a comprehensive examination of the data.

Stage 1: Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA)
Drawing on the work of Kress and van Leeuwen, each artifact underwent rigorous analysis to delineate how different semiotic modes (language, visual composition, color, spatial arrangement, etc.) worked synergistically to

create meaning. For instance, we examined how camera angles constructed social relationships and how color schemes evoked specific emotions or cultural associations. The coding process was conducted independently by two researchers who initially analyzed the corpus separately using a common analytical framework [12]. They then compared their coding results through iterative discussions, achieving an inter-coder reliability of 88%. Remaining discrepancies were resolved through consultation with a third researcher, ensuring consistent interpretation across the datasets.

Stage 2: Conceptual Integration Network Mapping

Building on the MDA findings, we constructed detailed conceptual integration networks for the key representational strategies identified in the artifacts. This involved systematically identifying core elements from the two primary input spaces—the "Traditional Nianli Space" and the "Contemporary English-Media Space"—and tracing their selective projection into new "Blended Spaces." The analysis specifically targeted the emergent structure within these blends—the novel meanings, narratives, and frames that were not originally present in either input space. This stage employed a consensus-based approach, where all three researchers collaboratively developed and refined the network mappings through weekly analysis meetings, discussing and reconciling different interpretations until full agreement was reached.

Through this rigorous analytical process applied to students' multimodal works, our study reveals a series of sophisticated conceptual blending operations employed during cultural translation. These operations demonstrate not only linguistic transfer but, more importantly, the students' creative capacity to cognitively negotiate between traditional culture and modern communicative contexts. The following two representative case analyses clearly illustrate the specific pathways of cultural innovation within the conceptual integration theoretical framework.

To illuminate these cognitive processes with greater granularity, we now turn to a detailed examination of two paradigmatic cases that exemplify distinct blending strategies observed across the student projects. These cases were selected for their particularly clear demonstration of how conceptual integration

operates as a mechanism for dual innovation.

4. Findings

The analysis of student-generated multimodal artifacts reveals a series of sophisticated conceptual blending operations. These operations illustrate the students' cognitive and semiotic strategies in mediating between traditional Nianli culture and contemporary global discourses. The following two cases, drawn from digital posters and videos respectively, exemplify distinct yet complementary pathways of cultural innovation observed across the projects. They serve as paradigmatic examples of how "dual innovation" was concretely achieved through conceptual integration.

4.1 Case 1: The Communal Feast as a Global Food Carnival

Within the Nianli festival, the "bai zhong" ritual holds a central position. This tradition is far more than a simple communal meal; it is a cultural practice rich in social and spiritual significance. Households lay out elaborate offerings in village squares or ancestral halls, with the entire community participating in the sharing. Its symbolic meaning encompasses clan unity, gratitude to deities, and the celebration of agricultural abundance. This ritual carries the identity and collective memory of the local community.

In the students' digital posters, this traditional ritual received a creative reinterpretation. One standout work, titled "Nianli: A Food Carnival of Blessings," clearly demonstrates the cognitive process of conceptual integration.

Input Space 1 (Traditional Nianli) contained core elements including: the kinship and locality-based "clan/community" network, "ritual offerings to deities" possessing sacredness, the ritualistic intention of expressing "gratitude/prayer," and material symbols of "agricultural bounty" (such as whole roasted pigs, chicken, rice cakes, and other traditional foods).

Input Space 2 (Contemporary Media) drew from the globalized discourse system of "food festivals." Its key elements included: an event framework emphasizing "social gathering/fun," presentation methods pursuing "visual appeal" (resembling the aesthetic standards of "food porn"), content arrangements showcasing "variety/abundance," and "interactive

experience" encouraging audience participation (e.g., invitational language like "come and taste").

In constructing the Blended Space, the students performed careful selective projection and frame shifting. They extracted the social aspect of "community" from Input Space 1 (specifically, the social bonds reinforced by collective feasting) and systematically mapped it onto the "social gathering" frame of Input Space 2. Simultaneously, the element of "agricultural bounty" from Input Space 1, representing material prosperity, was transformed into visually stunning, colorful close-ups of food that aligned with contemporary visual aesthetics. The composition style closely resembled that of mainstream Western cooking shows or popular food blogs, emphasizing the visual impact and appeal of the food.

The most crucial operation involved the significant compression and backgrounding of elements from Input Space 1 related to sacredness and religious ritual, namely the core aspects of "ritual offerings to deities" and "prayer." These elements, originally central in the traditional context, were marginalized in the newly constructed frame and were no longer the focus of the narrative.

The resulting Emergent Meaning, therefore, was no longer "a sacred ritual using food as a medium," but rather "a vibrant, community-driven global food carnival." This fundamental shift in meaning embodies the essence of "creative transformation." The core cultural values of community cohesion and material prosperity from the traditional practice are preserved and continued. However, their external forms of expression and narrative strategies are thoroughly updated to suit an increasingly secularized, global audience.

This strategic foregrounding of universally accessible elements while backgrounding culturally specific sacred components raises important questions about the potential trade-offs in such cultural translation. While this approach undoubtedly enhances cross-cultural accessibility, educators should guide students to reflect on whether this selective emphasis might risk excessive secularization or commodification of cultural heritage [13]. The very process that makes tradition accessible may simultaneously dilute its spiritual depth, presenting a fundamental dilemma in cultural transmission. This pedagogical moment offers a valuable

opportunity to discuss the inherent tensions between cultural preservation and popularization in globalization.

This transformation not only reduces the difficulty of cross-cultural understanding but also, by activating cognitive frameworks familiar to contemporary audiences, significantly enhances the accessibility and communicative effectiveness of the traditional culture. It opens new pathways for the survival and development of intangible cultural heritage in the modern era [14].

4.2 Case 2: The God Procession as an Immersive Cultural Journey

The "Youshen" (Procession of the Gods) ritual represents one of the most sacred core elements of the Nianli festival. In this traditional ceremony, villagers carry palanquins bearing deity statues along a fixed route passed down through generations, parading through the entire village to seek divine blessings and protection for the community. This event exhibits three distinctive characteristics: first, its solemn religious atmosphere, where despite the deafening sounds of firecrackers, the ritual maintains pious reverence toward the deities; second, clearly defined spatial and temporal boundaries, with the procession route strictly adhering to traditional regulations and procedural invariability; third, distinct participatory boundaries, as the ritual essentially serves as a religious practice for the specific group of villagers, naturally creating a clear distinction between "insiders" and "outsiders."

A student group created a video work titled "Walk with the Gods: An Immersive Nianli Journey," which creatively reconstructed this traditional ritual. Through meticulous conceptual integration, the work successfully transformed a local religious ceremony into a culturally engaging experience with global appeal. This transformation represents not merely a formal alteration but an innovative development of cultural significance through deep cognitive reframing.

During the conceptual integration process, features from the two input spaces were systematically analyzed and selected:

Input Space 1 (Traditional Nianli) contained core elements reflecting its sacred and enclosed nature. These included: absolute reverence for the "sacredness of the deities" during the procession, representing the spiritual core of the

entire ritual; the functional positioning of "blessing the community" through the ceremony, reflecting its social value; the strictly followed "fixed procession route," demonstrating the stability of tradition; and the "clearly defined participatory boundaries" based on villager identity, defining the ritual's audience scope. Together, these elements formed a complete yet closed system of meaning.

Input Space 2 (Contemporary Media) drew upon narrative models from modern documentary and travel vlog genres. Its representative elements included: "immersive experience" created through technical means like first-person narration and drone footage [15]; visual presentation effects pursuing "cinematic spectacle"; storytelling methods using "journey" as the core narrative framework; and "cross-cultural appeal" catering to the aesthetic preferences of global travelers [16]. These elements represent the latest trends in contemporary visual communication.

In constructing the Blended Space, the students demonstrated exceptional conceptual integration skills. They skillfully projected the "fixed procession route" from Input Space 1 onto the "journey" narrative framework of Input Space 2. This mapping not only achieved a conceptual transformation of spatial path but, more importantly, endowed the entire activity with a clear narrative arc, transforming it from an annually repeated ritual into a linear narrative with beginning, development, and climax. This conversion essentially represents an update in cognitive framing, enabling traditional cultural elements to gain new vitality within modern communication contexts.

The handling of the "sacredness" element deserves particular attention. In the blended space, the exclusive religious sacredness of the traditional ritual was preserved but achieved a creative transformation of meaning through integration with the modern value of a "unique cultural experience." Religious sacredness was reinterpreted as a culturally unique quality with universal value. This transformation preserved the core characteristics of the tradition while enhancing its comprehensibility and appreciation among audiences from different cultural backgrounds. This approach demonstrates the wisdom in cultural translation—maintaining cultural authenticity while improving the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication.

However, this creative reframing also invites critical reflection on the boundaries between cultural sharing and appropriation. While breaking the "insider/outsider" boundary through immersive techniques undoubtedly fosters cross-cultural understanding, educators should prompt students to consider whether such accessibility might compromise the ritual's authentic spiritual significance [17]. The very technological mediation that enables global participation may simultaneously create a curated experience that distances viewers from the tradition's lived reality. This tension between accessibility and authenticity presents a rich area for pedagogical discussion about the ethics and limitations of cultural representation.

On the technical implementation level, the video employed two highly symbolic filming techniques. The use of drone footage broke the limitations of the villagers' ground-level perspective. Through a "god's-eye" overhead view, it organically combined close-up rituals with village panoramas, showcasing both the macro scale of the ceremony and providing viewers with a transcendent visual experience. This perspective shift represents not only technical innovation but also a cognitive breakthrough, symbolizing the transition from a traditional participant's viewpoint to a modern observer's perspective. Simultaneously, the adoption of first-person narration ("Walk with us...") creatively dissolved the traditional "insider/outsider" boundary, incorporating global audiences into the participants' ranks and establishing strong emotional connections and identity recognition. This narrative strategy eliminated cultural distance, enabling remote viewers to experience a sense of immersive participation.

This carefully constructed blended space yielded significant Emergent Meaning: the final presentation was no longer merely a "religious procession" but an "immersive cultural journey into a living tradition." This fundamental shift in meaning embodies the essential characteristic of "innovative development." This integration not only created new perspectives for understanding the ritual but, more importantly, pioneered new models for experiencing and transmitting traditional culture. By utilizing modern media technology, the students significantly expanded the narrative dimension and expressive potential of this cultural practice while preserving its core values.

From a pedagogical perspective, this case fully demonstrates the application value of conceptual integration theory in cultural education. What students demonstrated in this process was not merely technical operational ability but a profound capacity for cultural understanding and innovation. Through careful semiotic selection and framework reconstruction, they achieved the modern translation of traditional culture—a capability that represents the core competency pursued in contemporary cross-cultural education.

This case also offers important implications for the contemporary preservation of intangible cultural heritage. It indicates that the protection of traditional culture should not involve rigid preservation but rather creative development based on respect for core values. By integrating with modern communication technologies, traditional rituals can acquire new forms of expression and channels of transmission, thereby maintaining their vitality and influence in contemporary society. This model of innovative development provides a reference paradigm for cultural heritage work in other regions.

5. Discussion

This study demonstrates that the process of creating English-language digital media serves as a powerful vehicle for achieving "dual innovation" in cultural heritage. Through the theoretical lens of Conceptual Integration Theory (CIT), we can systematically deconstruct the cognitive mechanisms underlying this process. The following sections elucidate how "creative transformation" and "innovative development" were realized through specific blending operations, concluding with an examination of the broader pedagogical and policy implications.

5.1 The Mechanisms of Dual Innovation: Selective Projection and Emergent Meaning

The analysis reveals two core cognitive mechanisms through which "dual innovation" was operationalized in the student projects.

5.1.1 Creative transformation via selective projection

Creative transformation was concretely achieved through the cognitive mechanism of selective projection. Students moved beyond literal translation, demonstrating strategic discernment by identifying aspects of the Nianli Festival with

high cross-cultural resonance. Universal values such as community bonding, the visual spectacle of ceremonial feasts, and the narrative power of a physical journey were strategically projected into the blended space.

Conversely, culturally specific elements that posed significant interpretive barriers—such as the precise identities of deities or intricate theological nuances—were deliberately backgrounded or compressed. This was not a simplistic omission but a sophisticated act of cultural mediation, requiring deep understanding of both the source culture and the target audience's cognitive frameworks. This process of "cultural prioritization" preserves the essence of the tradition while adapting its form for global communication.

5.1.2 Innovative development via emergent meaning

Innovative development emerged directly from the novel structures generated within the conceptual blend. The "global food carnival" and the "immersive cultural journey" were not pre-existing in either the traditional Nianli practice or modern media grammar alone. They were born from the dynamic fusion of both input spaces.

For instance, the "food carnival" blend fused the ritual's communal feasting with the contemporary media trope of culinary celebration, creating a new understanding that is both faithful to the tradition's emphasis on abundance and accessible to a global audience. This illustrates a fundamental principle: innovation in cultural education is not about invention from nothing, but about creating pedagogical conditions that facilitate the emergence of new meanings from the interaction between tradition and modernity.

5.2 Pedagogical Significance: Fostering Symbolic Competence

From a pedagogical perspective, the blending process demanded and facilitated deep, transformative learning. Students engaged in a multi-layered practice: deconstructing their own cultural traditions, deconstructing contemporary English media discourses, and synthesizing these understandings to solve an authentic communicative challenge [18].

This approach moves beyond the rote memorization of cultural facts, fostering what Claire Kramsch terms "symbolic competence"[19-20], a capability increasingly

emphasized in recent digitally-mediated language learning environments. By making deliberate choices about what and how to blend, students were not just using English; they were manipulating the symbolic systems of both culture and language to create new spaces for intercultural understanding.

5.3 An Integrative Model and its Policy Implications

To clearly present this pedagogical approach, Figure 2 illustrates its core components and operational mechanism, showing how PBL, multimodal design, and CIT synergistically drive the learning process.

Crucially, cultivating symbolic competence through conceptual blending represents a direct pathway to achieving the "innovative development" advocated by China's dual innovation policy. This model systematically nurtures the capacity to not merely inherit cultural traditions but to actively reinterpret and reinvent them, aligning with contemporary calls for innovative language pedagogy. Students emerge not as passive recipients of knowledge, but as innovative agents capable of contributing to the ongoing evolution of their cultural heritage.

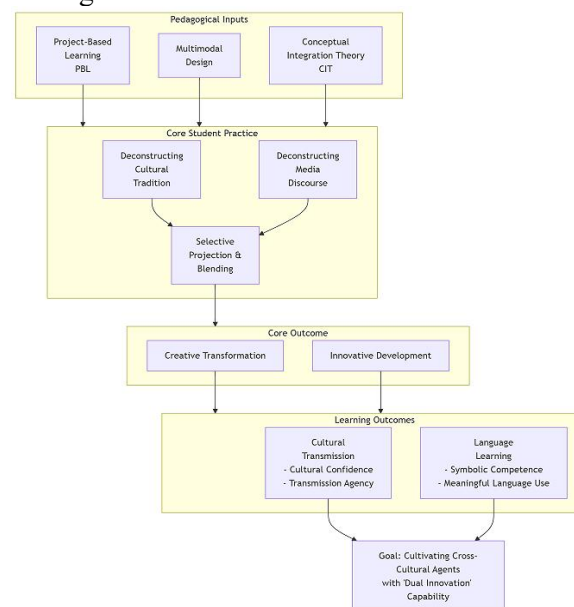


Figure 2. An Integrative Pedagogical Model for Cultural Transmission and Language Learning

5.4 Synthesis

In summary, the conceptual integration framework provides a powerful explanatory model for operationalizing "dual innovation" in

education. It reveals the cognitive underpinnings of cultural translation, demonstrating how strategic selection and creative recombination lead to both the transformation and development of cultural heritage. For educators in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond, this underscores the value of designing learning experiences that explicitly engage students in conceptual blending, equipping them with the skills to navigate and contribute to the ongoing evolution of their cultures in a globalized world.

6. Conclusion

This study has illustrated how a project-based, multimodal approach to ELT can serve as a dynamic mechanism for the "dual innovation" of local culture. By analyzing student work through conceptual integration theory, we have made visible the complex cognitive and semiotic processes through which tradition is reconfigured for new contexts. Students, in this model, are transformed from passive learners of culture into active, creative agents of its transmission and renewal.

6.1 Implications

For curriculum designers across the Asia-Pacific region, this study offers a compelling case for systematically integrating PBL modules that transform local cultural heritage into a dynamic foundation for creative, multimodal expression in English.

For teachers, the findings encourage a meaningful evolution in practice: from being primarily transmitters of knowledge to becoming facilitators who guide students through the complexities of cultural and linguistic negotiation. This role involves supporting learners as they navigate the challenging yet intellectually rich process of conceptual blending.

For policy makers, this research underscores the value of endorsing and resourcing pedagogical approaches that cultivate both creativity and critical cultural awareness. Such initiatives should be strategically aligned with wider cultural sustainability goals, ensuring that educational practice actively contributes to the preservation and revitalization of intangible heritage.

6.2 Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations of this study should be

acknowledged. First, the research was conducted on a relatively small scale within a single cultural context, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Second, the analysis focused primarily on the final multimodal products rather than the dynamic collaborative processes through which these artifacts were created. Future research could employ process-tracing methodologies to document how conceptual blending evolves throughout group interactions and decision-making. Third, the applicability of our findings may be particularly relevant to cultural traditions like the Nianli Festival that possess strong visual and performative elements. Their transferability to other forms of intangible cultural heritage—such as oral literature, folk music, or craft traditions—warrants further investigation.

These limitations suggest productive directions for future research. Subsequent studies could utilize eye-tracking technology to examine how international audiences perceive and interpret these culturally blended products, providing insights into their cross-cultural efficacy. Additionally, applying this pedagogical approach to other cultural domains—such as Chinese calligraphy, traditional opera, or indigenous storytelling—would help validate and refine the model's generalizability across diverse heritage contexts. Furthermore, longitudinal studies are needed to track the long-term impact of this pedagogical approach on the development of students' cultural identity and intercultural communication skills. Longitudinal designs incorporating pre- and post-assessments would also allow for more systematic measurement of developmental gains in both linguistic proficiency and cultural identity formation.

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