

Integrating Mount Tai Culture into College English Writing Instruction: A Production-Oriented Pedagogical Design Supported by the iWrite Digital Writing Platform

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Abstract: China's college English classroom remains an underused context for developing students' ability to express local culture in English, a problem long identified as "Chinese Culture Aphasia." While a growing body of research has explored integrating regional cultures, such as Yellow River and Ba-Shu cultures, into College English teaching, limited attention has been given to combining local-culture pedagogy with the technological affordances of automated writing evaluation (AWE). This paper proposes a pedagogical design for integrating Mount Tai (Taishan) culture into College English writing instruction through the Production-Oriented Approach (POA), supported by the iWrite digital writing platform. Drawing on research on local-culture pedagogy, AWE, and POA, the paper develops a Mount Tai culture writing resource bank, a three-phase "motivating–enabling–assessing" teaching cycle supported by iWrite, and a multi-source assessment structure. The design aims to give students sustained opportunities to communicate Mount Tai culture in English while offering a potentially transferable framework for technology-supported College English writing instruction. As a proposed design, its effectiveness and transferability remain to be examined through future empirical research.

Keywords: Mount Tai culture; college English teaching; Production-Oriented Approach; iWrite

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1. Introduction

English is a principal channel through which Chinese universities pursue cross-cultural communication, and College English, taken by most non-English majors, reaches a broad student population. Yet more than two decades of curricular reform have not resolved a persistent shortcoming: students often leave the course with adequate general English proficiency but little capacity to render Chinese culture, particularly their own regional culture, into accurate, natural English. Cong ^[1] first named this phenomenon "Chinese

Culture Aphasia,” arguing that Chinese learners often know their own culture only vaguely and, even when they know it well, lack the linguistic resources to express it in English. The phenomenon persists: students continue to struggle to move between the Western-culture content dominating most textbooks and the Chinese, especially local, culture they are rarely taught to express^[2,3].

Two structural causes are commonly cited. First, mainstream College English textbooks are overwhelmingly oriented toward English-speaking countries, leaving Chinese and especially regional culture largely absent^[4,5]. Second, many teachers have limited grounding in local cultural knowledge and rarely integrate it systematically into practice^[6]. In response, research has tested pathways for embedding regional and revolutionary culture into College English instruction^[7–12], including, for Mount Tai culture specifically, within course-based ideological-political education^[13] and within broader campus curricula^[14,15]. These studies share a comparatively thin technological dimension: few pair regional-culture pedagogy with the sustained, iterative feedback that digital writing platforms can offer, leaving the systematicity of such integration underdeveloped.

Mount Tai (Taishan), in Tai’an, Shandong, is among China’s most culturally significant mountains and was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1987 for both natural and cultural value. It carries values of substantial educative worth: perseverance embodied in the act of ascent, inclusiveness reflected in its long history of syncretic Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist practice, and the sense of responsibility associated with its imperial Fengshan sacrificial rites^[14]. For Tai’an’s own universities, Mount Tai culture is an unusually direct and locally resonant vehicle for addressing Chinese Culture Aphasia. iWrite, among the most widely used AWE systems in Chinese higher education, offers immediate, sentence-level feedback and has been shown to support sustained revision and complement teacher feedback^[16]. Recent work further suggests that combining AI-supported feedback with culture-themed content can strengthen students’ cultural awareness and their capacity to communicate local culture in English^[17].

Two questions remain underexplored: how local culture can be converted systematically into sustained English output rather than isolated exercises, and how digital technology can support the repeated writing–feedback–revision cycles such output requires. This paper proposes an iWrite-supported pedagogical framework for integrating Mount Tai culture into College English writing at Taishan University, built from three complementary elements: Mount Tai culture, which supplies what students write about; POA^[18,19], which supplies how teaching is organised; and iWrite, which supplies how writing, feedback, and revision are supported. The paper reviews relevant literature, then develops a theoretical framework and pedagogical design comprising a resource bank, a three-phase teaching cycle, and a multi-source assessment structure. As the design has not yet been implemented, this paper is conceived as a conceptual pedagogical design rather than an empirical report, intended to make the rationale available for scrutiny ahead of classroom implementation.

2. Literature review

2.1. Local culture integration into college English teaching

“Chinese Culture Aphasia”^[1] remains evident in contemporary College English education, attributed partly to an imbalance in cultural content—materials favour English-speaking cultures over Chinese and regional ones^[4,5]—and to teachers’ limited local cultural knowledge and pedagogical practices for incorporating it^[6]. This imbalance can constrain students’ ability to participate in intercultural communication and express

Chinese culture in English ^[2,3].

Researchers have increasingly explored integrating regional and thematic culture into College English, including Yellow River culture ^[20], Ba-Shu culture ^[8], and revolutionary culture ^[9,10,11]. Liu ^[7] shows how Chinese cultural elements can be incorporated into writing instruction through rhetorical modes such as exemplification and comparison, and Luo ^[12] demonstrates a POA-based approach to integrating red culture into audio-visual-speaking instruction. Research on Mount Tai culture specifically is also emerging: Li ^[13] maps its striving spirit, responsibility, and inclusiveness onto textbook units and proposes a resource bank and project-based activities, while Jia ^[14] and Xiao ^[15] highlight its educational value mainly within ideological-political education rather than writing instruction. Collectively, these studies demonstrate the feasibility of local-culture integration but give limited attention to digital tools supporting sustained writing, feedback, and revision.

2.2. Automated writing evaluation and the iWrite platform

AWE has become an important technological support in Chinese university English writing, with iWrite among the most prominent platforms studied ^[21], offering rapid sentence-level and elaborative feedback that allows repeated revision. Evidence should be interpreted with caution: Qian et al. ^[21], using Kane's argument-based validity framework, found only weak correlations between iWrite scores and trained human ratings, questioning its suitability for high-stakes assessment. Classroom-focused studies, however, report more positive outcomes, including satisfaction, engagement in revision, and improved confidence and quality ^[16]. iWrite therefore appears better positioned as a formative feedback and revision tool that complements, rather than replaces, teacher and peer evaluation. AI-supported feedback combined with culture-themed content may also support cultural awareness and students' ability to communicate local culture in English ^[17].

2.3. The production-oriented approach

POA, developed by Wen Qiufang and colleagues, addresses the separation of language learning from language use in Chinese tertiary foreign-language education through three interconnected phases—motivating, enabling, and assessing ^[18,19]. Students first encounter a meaningful output task, receive targeted input and scaffolding, and have their output assessed against the original communicative goal. POA's output-oriented logic is well suited to transforming Mount Tai cultural knowledge into meaningful writing practice: within the enabling and assessing phases, a resource bank can supply cultural and linguistic input while iWrite facilitates rapid feedback and revision. Although POA has been applied to culture-themed instruction (e.g., Luo ^[12]), its combination with Mount Tai culture and AWE-supported writing remains underexplored, motivating the framework proposed here.

3. Theoretical framework

The design rests on three complementary elements, each answering a different question about the same instructional problem: Mount Tai culture supplies what students write about, addressing Chinese Culture Aphasia with content specific to Tai'an; POA supplies how teaching is organised, through a motivating–enabling–assessing cycle built around authentic writing tasks; and iWrite supplies how writing, feedback, and revision are supported, providing the rapid, repeatable feedback loop that sustained revision at scale requires ^[16].

These elements combine into a single conceptual pathway (**Figure 1**). Students first encounter curated

Mount Tai cultural content organised around themes mapped onto existing textbook units, so cultural learning is integrated with rather than added onto the syllabus. They then attempt an authentic Mount Tai-themed writing task, receive targeted cultural and linguistic input, and use iWrite’s automated feedback to drive repeated cycles of self-directed revision. Finally, texts are evaluated through a triangulated combination of teacher feedback, iWrite’s automated scores, and structured peer review; no single source, particularly the AWE system alone, should determine the final assessment, given its questioned validity^[21].

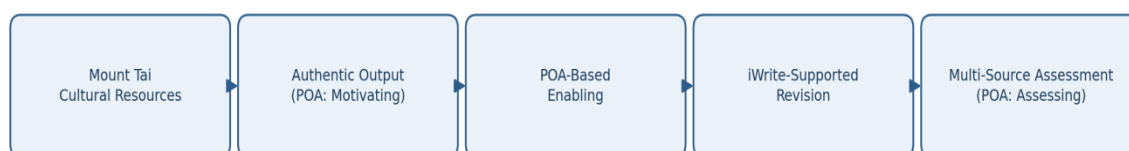


Figure 1. The Mount Tai culture writing pedagogical cycle.

This framework treats digital writing technology not as a replacement for culture pedagogy or teacher expertise, but as a mechanism enabling a volume and frequency of revision difficult for one instructor to sustain across a full class working on locally grounded writing tasks. It is deliberately POA-consistent: cultural input is withheld until students encounter a task they cannot yet complete (motivating), then supplied selectively in service of that task (enabling), with the resulting production checked against the original communicative goal (assessing).

4. Pedagogical design

4.1. Building a Mount Tai culture writing resource bank

The first component is a resource bank developed around five core cultural elements central to Mount Tai’s symbolic repertoire: the spirit of perseverance embodied in the act of ascent pandeng jingshen (攀登精神); the ethic of endurance represented by the mountain’s traditional load-carrying porters tiaoshangong jingshen (挑山工精神), whose spirit has been promoted by President Xi Jinping and analysed as a resource for ideological-political education^[15]; the folk custom of Shi Gandang (石敢当), a guardian-stone tradition diffused across East Asian folk religion; the long history of syncretic Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist coexistence on the mountain; and the imperial Fengshan (封禅) sacrificial rites historically performed at its summit. For each element, the bank assembles background readings, key vocabulary, model paragraphs, and discussion prompts in English, cross-checked for accuracy against primary and secondary sources.

Rather than a stand-alone supplement, the bank is mapped onto the thematic units of Taishan University’s College English textbooks, pairing each cultural element with a unit whose theme it naturally extends—for example, perseverance and ascent with a unit on personal achievement, or religious syncretism with a unit on belief systems. This alignment addresses the gap identified in the literature, whereby textbook content is heavily weighted toward target-language culture^[4], by inserting regionally grounded content where it is most likely to be perceived as relevant. The bank is also intended as a standalone, reusable output that

can be shared with other instructors and adapted by other institutions.

4.2. A three-phase, iWrite-mediated teaching cycle

The second component translates POA's motivating and enabling phases into a concrete writing cycle mediated by iWrite; assessment is addressed in Section 4.3.

Motivating phase. Each unit opens with an authentic, Mount Tai-themed writing scenario exposing a genuine communicative gap—for instance, drafting an English introduction to Mount Tai for an exchange student, or connecting the mountain's spirit of perseverance to students' own experience. Students attempt the task before receiving substantial input, encountering the limits of their ability to express Mount Tai-related content in English; this unscored attempt generates motivation for the input phase, consistent with POA's output-driven hypothesis.

Enabling phase. The teacher then introduces relevant resource-bank material—vocabulary, model expressions, background content, short model texts—selected to help students complete the task just attempted. Students produce a full draft and submit it to iWrite for automated feedback.

Iterative revision. Because iWrite provides near-instantaneous, sentence-level commentary, students can revise and resubmit multiple times within a class period or short homework cycle, working independently on language-level accuracy while the teacher circulates to address content- and cultural-level concerns less suited to automated feedback—a division of labour reflecting AWE's validity limitations^[21]. Over two to three cycles, the design aims to move students from drafts focused on language-level concerns toward drafts with more developed cultural content, though this progression remains a hypothesis for classroom confirmation.

4.3. Multi-source assessment

The third component specifies how writing produced through the cycle is evaluated in POA's assessing phase, drawing on three triangulated sources: iWrite's automated score, offered as one formative data point rather than a final grade; structured peer review, in which students comment on language and cultural content using a shared rubric; and teacher assessment, carrying primary weight and focusing on cultural accuracy, argumentative coherence, and communicative success.

This structure captures each evaluator's complementary strengths—iWrite's speed and consistency, peers' engagement as fellow readers, and the teacher's cultural and pedagogical judgement—while avoiding over-reliance on any one source, particularly the automated system, given its questioned validity^[21]. Across a semester, the full cycle is intended to repeat across each of the five thematic units, so students progress through cumulative encounters with Mount Tai culture, with later units drawing lightly on earlier vocabulary and structures.

5. Contributions and pedagogical significance

The design makes two main contributions. Theoretically, it extends research on integrating regional culture into College English by bringing together three strands generally examined separately: local-culture pedagogy, POA, and AWE-supported writing. Previous studies explored regional and revolutionary cultures^[8-,12, 20], while POA and AWE research developed largely in parallel. The present framework connects these strands, with Mount Tai culture providing content, POA structuring the process, and iWrite supporting iterative writing and

revision, while proposing a more appropriately limited role for AWE—as a formative feedback tool within a broader teacher- and peer-supported system rather than an autonomous evaluator.

Practically, the framework offers a structured approach for integrating local cultural content into existing College English writing instruction: the resource bank and task designs connect regional themes with existing textbook units, while the three-phase cycle provides a systematic pathway from cultural content to English output and revision. Although the materials are grounded in Mount Tai culture, the underlying principles—mapping local themes onto existing curricula, creating authentic output tasks, supporting iterative revision through digital feedback, and combining automated, peer, and teacher assessment—may be adapted to other regional contexts.

More broadly, the framework responds to the continuing need to develop students' ability to communicate Chinese culture in English, particularly culture locally meaningful to their own communities. For Taishan University students, learning to communicate Mount Tai culture in English can provide a meaningful context for writing while connecting language learning with local cultural knowledge and intercultural communication. The design therefore offers not a tested solution, but a theoretically grounded, practically oriented model to inform future classroom practice and empirical investigation.

6. Limitations and future research

The framework has several limitations. First, because this paper presents a pedagogical design rather than an empirical intervention, its effectiveness cannot be established from the present analysis; whether it can improve students' ability to communicate local culture through English writing remains an empirical question for future classroom-based research examining both linguistic performance and the quality of culturally grounded writing.

Second, the framework incorporates iWrite despite documented concerns about the validity of its automated scoring relative to trained human raters ^[21]. Although its proposed use emphasises formative feedback rather than autonomous assessment, automated feedback may still be incomplete regarding cultural interpretation, communicative purpose, and other higher-level dimensions of writing. Future research should examine how students interpret and respond to automated feedback and how it interacts with teacher and peer feedback.

Third, the design is grounded specifically in Mount Tai culture and the context of Taishan University; its applicability elsewhere cannot be assumed. Future studies could adapt the framework to other local-cultural contexts to determine which elements are transferable and which require modification, clarifying whether it represents a broader model for local-culture integration or primarily a context-specific design.

7. Conclusion

This paper has proposed a pedagogical framework for integrating Mount Tai culture into College English writing instruction at Taishan University through the complementary use of POA and the iWrite platform. Responding to the persistent problem of Chinese Culture Aphasia and the limited integration of regional culture into English writing instruction, the framework brings together a Mount Tai culture writing resource bank, an output-oriented three-phase teaching cycle, iWrite-supported iterative revision, and multi-source assessment. The central proposition is that local cultural content, an output-oriented pedagogical structure,

and appropriately positioned digital feedback can together create a more systematic environment for students to learn to communicate their own culture through English writing. Mount Tai culture provides meaningful content, POA organises the learning process, and iWrite supports repeated feedback and revision without replacing teacher and peer evaluation. As a conceptual and pedagogical contribution, the framework offers a practical way of connecting local culture, English writing, and digital technology within existing College English instruction; its effectiveness and transferability, however, remain subjects for future empirical investigation.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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