

A Study on Cultural Representation in Senior High School English Textbooks

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of globalization, cross-cultural communication has become increasingly frequent. As a global lingua franca, English serves as a vital bridge for cross-cultural communication. Based on an analytical framework for cultural representation in foreign language textbooks, this study adopts a combination of quantitative statistics and qualitative analysis to systematically examine cultural representation in the 2019 edition of FLTRP senior high school English textbooks. The findings indicate that the textbooks give prominent coverage to target language culture and Chinese culture, with certain attention paid to the cultures of other countries, yet the representation of international culture is notably insufficient. From the dimension of cultural forms, the textbooks are dominated by cultural products, followed by cultural practices and cultural figures; the representation of cultural ideas is relatively weak, while cultural communities are underrepresented. In terms of modes of cultural representation, cultural discourses account for the largest proportion, with other categories distributed relatively evenly, and the cultural knowledge section has the lowest proportion.

Keywords: Cultural Forms; English Textbooks; Cultural Representation; Senior High School; Target Language Culture

1. Introduction

In March 2023, Lv Yugang, Director of the Department of Basic Education of the Ministry of Education, pointed out in an interview with the journal *People's Education* that digital empowerment of education has become an irresistible trend. Basic education needs to further implement new curricula and new textbooks, deepen education and teaching reforms, and lay a solid foundation for cultivating top innovative talents. As a complex

whole, culture is usually mediated through language textbooks to serve language learning [1]. Textbooks largely determine teaching content and exert profound guiding significance on teaching practice.

The General High School English Curriculum Standard (hereinafter referred to as the "New Curriculum Standard") clearly states in the section on curriculum nature that English, as a global lingua franca, is learned and used to help students acquire outstanding achievements of human civilization, spread Chinese culture, and enhance mutual understanding and communication between China and other countries. As a core resource for carrying cultural content and realizing curriculum objectives [2], senior high school English textbooks should attach importance to the diversity of world cultures, present multicultural content, cover cultural attitudes and consciousness from different perspectives [3], and demonstrate the rich connotations of culture through diverse presentation modes.

Against this background, this study takes the 2019 edition of FLTRP senior high school compulsory English textbooks as the research object, conducts an in-depth analysis of cultural representation in these textbooks, and focuses on examining the intensity and formal characteristics of cultural representation, with the aim of providing references for the optimization of senior high school English textbooks and the realization of cultural education goals.

2. Literature Review

The definition of textbooks is open to multiple interpretations. Cheng Xiaotang points out that only through an in-depth and systematic understanding of the definition of textbooks can one grasp their essential connotation at a macro level. From a broad perspective, textbooks refer to all materials used by teachers in classroom teaching to enhance students' cognitive levels and skills, including supplementary resources

such as slides and teaching aids; from a narrow perspective, textbooks specifically refer to various editions of "textbooks" and serve as the core carrier of curriculum content [4]. As an important foundation for teaching activities [5], textbooks are core teaching resources for both teachers and students. They must follow specific educational theories and teaching principles, and possess scientificity, practicality, and heuristic value to adapt to the needs and development of teaching practice.

In the field of cultural classification research, [6] divides culture into five major categories based on its constituent elements: material culture, spiritual culture, behavioral culture, ideological culture, and social culture [7], drawing on Kachru's Three Circles Model of English (Inner Circle, Outer Circle, and Expanding Circle), categorize the culture presented in textbook discourses into six types: Inner Circle English culture, Outer Circle English culture, Expanding Circle English culture, common culture, cultural comparison, and culture of unknown origin. Zhang & Yu [8] further subdivides Chinese culture into traditional culture, revolutionary culture, and modern culture.

Some scholars have further examined the integrated presentation of Chinese culture across primary, junior high and senior high school English textbooks. Yang & Jiang [9] found that Chinese culture was imbalanced in distribution across different educational stages, with cultural products overrepresented while cultural communities and cultural ideas being relatively insufficient. They emphasized that textbook compilation should enhance the coherent and spiral arrangement of Chinese culture to match students' cognitive development.

Sorting out and analyzing the modes of cultural representation in textbooks helps to intuitively and systematically grasp the distribution characteristics of cultural content. In view of this, this study selects Books 1–3 of the compulsory senior high school English textbooks published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP) as the research object to conduct a cultural content analysis, with the aim of providing a valuable reference for frontline teachers when teaching cultural sections in textbooks.

Domestic scholars have also conducted quantitative studies on cultural representation in widely used senior high school English textbooks. Yan & Liu [10] analyzed the 2019

edition of PEP senior high school English textbooks and found that foreign culture was significantly more represented than Chinese culture in textual, audio, and video modes. About 50% of the units showed a bias toward foreign culture, especially in tool-themed units such as science and technology and money values, which may lead to structural deviations in students' intercultural cognition. Their study also proposed that textbook designers should establish a linkage mechanism between cultural ratio and modal adaptation, and teachers should act as active regulators to balance cultural presentation in teaching.

Domestic scholars have also explored the dynamic construction and presentation of Chinese culture in senior high school English textbooks during the compilation process. Tian, Ke & Wang [11] conducted a diachronic analysis of three versions of SISU senior high school English textbooks and found that the representation of Chinese culture has evolved from single textual presentation to diversified multimodal forms including pictures, audio and video. Meanwhile, the construction of the Chinese cultural system has been continuously optimized through the interaction between explicit and implicit culture as well as the integration of "Culture with a big C" and "culture with a small c". Their study also identified curriculum standards, guidance from educational authorities and teamwork of compilers as the key factors affecting the integration of Chinese culture in textbook development.

Recent studies have revealed problems in the cultural representation of Chinese senior high school English textbooks. Chen [12] notes that most textbooks overemphasize target culture and native culture, with insufficient international culture; cultural products dominate while cultural ideas and communities are lacking; and explicit discourses are the main presentation mode. These conclusions provide a practical reference for this study.

3. Theoretical Foundation

Zhang Hong and Li Xiaonan establish a dual-dimensional framework for analyzing cultural representation in textbooks, encompassing both geographical scope and cultural forms. Geographically, they categorize culture into target language culture, learners' native language culture, cultures of other

countries, and international culture. Formally, culture is divided into cultural products, cultural practices, cultural ideas, cultural figures, and cultural communities.

Target language culture primarily refers to the cultures of English native-speaking countries, including the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and Ireland. Learners' native language culture corresponds to Chinese culture, which can be further subdivided into fine traditional Chinese culture, revolutionary culture, and advanced culture; this study adopts classification to frame Chinese culture as traditional, revolutionary, and modern culture. Cultures of other countries cover those of all outer-circle and expanding-circle nations, as well as other non-English native-speaking countries, while international culture denotes transnational or global cultures without distinct national or regional affiliations.

Drawing on Moran [13], the formal dimension defines cultural products as material artifacts created to meet human survival and developmental needs (e.g., food, clothing, literary works); cultural practices as patterns of daily life and behavior (e.g., festival customs, codes of conduct); cultural ideas as core values and beliefs that underpin products and practices; cultural figures as representative individuals of specific cultural groups; and cultural communities as national or ethnic cultural identities (e.g., African American culture).

Regarding modes of presentation, cultural content in textbooks is primarily delivered through five channels: cultural discourses, cultural knowledge sections, images/introductions, background cultural information, and activities/exercises (see Table 1).

Table 1. Analytical Framework for Cultural Representation in Foreign Language Textbooks (Zhang & Li, 2022)

Mode of Representation	Description
Cultural Discourse	Discourses in input materials and exercise sections that center on one or more types of cultural content as their core theme.
Cultural Knowledge Section	Dedicated sections in input materials that introduce one or more types of cultural content.
Images/Quotations	Images and quotations presented in input materials and exercise sections that embody cultural content.
Background Cultural Information	Cultural information provided as background knowledge in input materials and exercise sections to facilitate understanding of the aforementioned cultures, images, quotations, or other content in explicit modules, including references to people, place names, media outlets, etc.
Activities/Exercises	Activities or exercises themselves that involve cultural comprehension, cultural expression, or language learning tasks embedded with cultural content.

4. Research Design

4.1 Research Questions

Based on the Analytical Framework for Cultural Representation in Foreign Language Textbooks, this study systematically analyzes the cultural content and modes of representation in Books 1–3 of the compulsory senior high school English textbooks published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP), and addresses the following three core research questions:

1. What regional or national cultures are represented in the FLTRP senior high school English textbooks?
2. What are the characteristics of cultural form representation in the FLTRP senior high school English textbooks?
3. What are the characteristics of the modes of cultural representation in the FLTRP senior high school English textbooks?

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4.2 Textbook Selection

This study selects the 2019 edition of Books 1–3 of the compulsory FLTRP senior high school English textbooks as the research sample. The rationale is as follows: this textbook version is widely adopted in basic education in the region where the study is conducted. An analysis of its cultural representation is more closely aligned with frontline teaching practices, and the findings can directly serve local teaching needs and student learning analysis, thus possessing strong practical and academic value.

4.3 Research Methods

This study adopts content analysis to code and

quantitatively analyze all sections of the 2019 FLTRP senior high school English textbooks (Books 1–3) through a three-level coding process:

First-level coding: Sorting out all textbook sections and labeling the region or country to which each cultural content belongs.

Second-level coding: Classifying and coding the geographically labeled cultural content according to the dimension of cultural forms.

Third-level coding: Further categorizing the cultural content into corresponding modes of cultural representation.

Quantitative analysis: Conducting statistical processing and analysis on the coding results to summarize the overall characteristics of cultural representation.

5. Results and Discussions

5.1 Analysis of Cultural Geographical Distribution

From the geographical dimension, target language culture accounts for the largest proportion (42.65%) in the FLTRP senior high school English textbooks, followed by learners' native language culture (Chinese culture) at 32.35%, while cultures of other countries and international culture account for 19.12% and 5.88% respectively (see Table 2 for details).

As a foreign language textbook, the dominant representation of target language culture aligns with the fundamental principles of language teaching. It facilitates students' in-depth understanding of the cultural and social contexts of English-speaking countries, providing authentic contexts and cultural references for language acquisition. Furthermore, the textbook's strong emphasis on Chinese culture reflects the core orientation of China's foreign language education: "inheriting and promoting fine Chinese culture and fostering cultural self-confidence." This helps deepen students' cognition and identification with their native culture, and enhances their cultural pride and sense of agency in cultural communication. In addition, the moderate inclusion of cultures of other countries and international culture conforms to the trend of globalization and internationalization, building a platform for cross-cultural exchange and contributing to the cultivation of students' global vision and intercultural communicative competence.

Table 2. Cultural Geographical Distribution

Geographical Category	Percentage
Target Language Culture	42.65%
Learners' Native Language Culture	32.35%
Cultures of Other Countries	19.12%
International Culture	5.88%

5.2 Analysis of Cultural Forms

From the perspective of cultural forms, cultural products account for the largest proportion (60%) in the textbooks, followed by cultural practices (16.36%), cultural figures (18.18%), and cultural ideas (5.45%). Notably, no content related to cultural communities is presented (see Table 3 for details).

Cultural products are primarily material and concrete, such as literary works and artistic creations. This intuitive and tangible form of representation is easier for students to understand and more effective in stimulating their learning interest and cultural awareness. The textbook's introduction to cultural practices—such as the customs of the Spring Festival and Lantern Festival, as well as table manners—helps students grasp traditional cultural lifestyles and deepen their cultural understanding through contextual experience. Meanwhile, by featuring Chinese and foreign cultural figures like Tu Youyou and Benjamin Franklin, the textbook enables students to directly perceive the deeds and contributions of outstanding individuals, reinforcing the exemplary role of cultural role models. Furthermore, the inclusion of famous quotes from figures like Aristotle conveys core cultural ideas in a fragmented manner, though the overall proportion is low, indicating insufficient systematic presentation of in-depth values.

Table 3. Cultural Forms

Cultural Form	Percentage
Cultural Products	60%
Cultural Practices	16.36%
Cultural Figures	18.18%
Cultural Ideas	5.45%
Cultural Communities	0

5.3 Analysis of Modes of Cultural Representation

From the perspective of modes of cultural representation, cultural discourses account for the largest proportion (38.18%), followed by activities/exercises (23.64%). Both background cultural information and images/quotations

account for 18.18%, while cultural knowledge sections represent the smallest share at only 1.82% (see Table 4 for details).

Cultural discourses serve as the core carrier for conveying cultural connotations in textbooks. Through complete narratives and contextualized expressions, they enable students to deeply and meticulously grasp the essence of culture. For example, the discursive presentation of content such as Spring Festival customs and Peking Opera provides students with an immersive path to cultural understanding. The activities/exercises section, through task-based design, guides students to apply their acquired cultural knowledge in language practice, achieving "integration of learning and application" and deepening their cultural comprehension. Background cultural information is often presented in the form of brief biographies (e.g., of Jules Verne, Benjamin Franklin, etc.), providing necessary authorial and historical context to support discourse comprehension and helping students construct a complete chain of cultural cognition. Images/quotations, with their intuitiveness and visual impact, efficiently convey cultural information through artworks, movie posters, and other forms, effectively compensating for the limitations of pure text presentation. The notably low proportion of cultural knowledge sections, however, reflects insufficient thematic presentation of systematic cultural knowledge in the textbooks.

Table 4. Modes of Cultural Representation

Mode of Cultural Representation	Percentage
Cultural Discourses	38.18%
Exercises/Activities	23.64%
Background Cultural Information	18.18%
Images/Quotations	18.18%
Cultural Knowledge Sections	1.82%

In summary, the FLTRP senior high school English textbooks demonstrate a degree of diversity in cultural representation: geographically, they cover target language culture, Chinese culture, cultures of other countries, and international culture; formally, they focus on cultural products, practices, and figures; and in terms of modes of representation, they include cultural discourses, exercises/activities, background cultural information, images/quotations, etc. This multi-dimensional structure helps students perceive and understand different cultures

comprehensively.

At the same time, notable deficiencies exist in the textbooks' cultural representation:

Imbalanced geographical distribution: Target language culture and Chinese culture account for the majority, while cultures of other countries are underrepresented, and international culture constitutes only 5.88%, resulting in insufficient coverage of global multiculturalism.

Narrow range of cultural forms: The textbooks are dominated by concrete cultural products (60%), with limited representation of cultural practices, figures, and ideas, and a complete absence of cultural communities, which hinders a full depiction of the social and collective nature of culture.

Uneven modes of representation: Cultural discourses account for the largest share (38.18%), while cultural knowledge sections represent only 1.82%, lacking systematic and thematic presentation of cultural knowledge and impeding students' construction of a complete cultural cognitive framework.

Based on the above findings, this study proposes the following recommendations for textbook compilers and frontline teachers:

Geographical dimension: Textbook compilers should appropriately increase the proportion of international culture, introducing more global cultural topics without distinct national backgrounds to foster students' understanding of a multicultural world. In teaching, teachers can supplement multimedia resources to expand students' international cultural horizons and strengthen their global awareness.

Cultural form dimension: Compilers should integrate content related to cultural communities (e.g., ethnic cultures, community cultures) to fill the current gap, helping students fully grasp the collective attributes of culture. Teachers can adopt multimodal teaching methods, using audio and video materials to vividly present the lifestyles of cultural communities and deepen students' understanding of cultural diversity.

6 Conclusion

The core goal of English education is to guide students in appreciating excellent Chinese and foreign cultures, cultivate a sense of national identity, strengthen cultural self-confidence, and gradually enhance their intercultural communicative competence. The presentation and structure of cultural content in textbooks directly influence students' learning outcomes

and value identification. Therefore, textbook compilers and frontline teachers should adapt to the needs of the times, optimize the geographical distribution, formal structure, and modes of representation of cultural content, promote diversified and balanced cultural presentation, and effectively cultivate students' intercultural awareness and core competencies.

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