

A Study on the Presentation of Chinese Culture in High School English Textbooks Based on PEP Required Textbooks

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Abstract: In the context of advocating cultural education, this study, based on an analytical framework for Chinese culture in English textbooks, takes the three compulsory textbooks (2019 edition) of high school English published by PEP as the research object, and uses content analysis to conduct quantitative statistics and qualitative analysis of the presentation of Chinese culture. The study finds that the proportions of different types of Chinese culture are uneven, with traditional culture dominating and revolutionary culture rarely presented; the forms of presentation are diverse, with cultural products and cultural practices presented more than cultural concepts, cultural communities, and cultural figures; the presentation methods generally focus on texts and tasks, with cultural expression and cultural understanding also accounting for a high proportion. Based on the above findings, this study puts forward targeted suggestions to provide references for textbook compilation and cultural teaching.

Keywords: English Textbooks; Presentation of Chinese Culture; Cultural Content Types; Presentation Modes

1. Introduction

In the context of increasingly close global cultural exchanges, promoting Chinese culture to the “go global” has become an important part of national cultural strategies. The General Senior High School English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition) clearly states that English teaching should systematically integrate traditional Chinese culture, guiding students to strengthen cultural confidence and enhance cultural identity. English curriculum, as an important subject of basic education, not only carries the basic function of language teaching but also shoulders the important mission of promoting local culture, enhancing cultural

identity, and cultivating cross-cultural communication skills [1].

Textbooks, as the main carrier of curriculum implementation, are the core channel for cultural presentation and transmission. Their content selection, arrangement, and presentation strategies directly affect students’ understanding and emotional identification with Chinese culture [2]. However, existing studies have generally focused on the analysis of target language cultures such as British and American cultures in English textbooks, lacking in-depth exploration of the systematic presentation of Chinese culture. Especially at the high school level, there is a significant lack of research on the presentation of Chinese culture in PEP compulsory modules. In view of this, this study takes the compulsory textbooks 1-3 of the PEP (2019) high school English textbooks as the research object, and deeply analyzes the characteristics of Chinese culture presentation from three dimensions: type, form, and mode.

2. Literature Review

This section mainly defines the key term “Chinese culture” and sorts out related research on the content and methods of Chinese culture presentation.

2.1 Conceptual Definition

Chinese culture is the sum of material and spiritual wealth accumulated by the Chinese nation over thousands of years of historical evolution. Its connotation is both historical and developmental, constantly enriched and expanded with the times [3]. Based on the practice of textbook research, this study divides Chinese culture into two core categories: traditional culture and modern culture.

Traditional culture is the rational wisdom and survival crystallization accumulated by the Chinese nation in the course of more than 5,000 years of civilization, covering traditional arts, traditional life, traditional morality, language

and culture, etc., such as traditional festivals, traditional Chinese medicine, calligraphy, and classic literature. It is the foundation of Chinese culture [4,5]. Modern culture is a cultural form formed in response to the modernization needs of politics and society, covering contemporary content such as modern scientific and technological achievements, ecological civilization, aerospace, and national new image [6,7].

2.2 Studies on Cultural Presentation in English Textbooks

Research on culture in foreign English textbooks has undergone an evolution from “target language culture centrism” to “multicultural integration.” At the end of the 20th century, Cortazzi and Jin pointed out that English textbooks generally emphasize British and American culture, neglecting other cultures, forming a “cultural hegemony” phenomenon [2]. In the 21st century, research focused on the integration of learner culture and international culture. To improve analytical accuracy, Yuen proposed a “Cultural Density Index (CDI)” to assess the cultural diversity of textbooks by quantifying the frequency of cultural elements in texts, images, and activities [8]. Thapa found that local cultural content accounts for less than 30% of Nepalese English textbooks, which is not conducive to the construction of students’ cultural identity [9].

Research on English textbooks in China has roughly gone through three stages. The first stage was the foundation period (before 2010), which focused on statistics and criticism of the proportion of target language culture. For example, Zhou found that British and American culture accounted for more than 70% of several sets of junior high school English textbooks, while Chinese cultural content was scarce [10]. The second stage was the development period (2010-2022), as the curriculum standards were promulgated, research shifted to the systematic integration of Chinese culture and the preliminary exploration of presentation carriers. Some studies examined the value function of Chinese culture in textbooks, and some focused on the design characteristics of cultural carriers (discourse, exercises, pictures) [11,12]. The third stage (2023 to present) is characterized by refinement, empiricism, and localization. Studies have found the universality of unbalanced cultural types [13,14], pointed out that the

balanced configuration of explicit and implicit presentation is key, and proposed that cultural presentation should strengthen the “dynamic comparison of Chinese and foreign cultures” and the “explicit interpretation of cultural concepts” [15,16].

Although some studies have preliminarily explored the presentation of Chinese culture in high school English textbooks, in-depth research on the PEP (2019) compulsory modules is lacking. Therefore, this study selects PEP (2019) high school English compulsory textbooks 1-3 as the research object, based on the analytical framework and the policy orientation of the curriculum standards, using content analysis to systematically evaluate the characteristics of Chinese culture presentation in textbooks, providing theoretical support and practical reference for textbook optimization and cultural teaching.

3. Analytical Framework for Chinese Culture Presentation

This study’s three-dimensional analytical framework is rooted in the cross-validation of policy requirements, theoretical basis, and methodology. The policy level takes the General Senior High School English Curriculum Standards as the programmatic document, which requires textbooks to systematically present traditional and modern Chinese culture. The theoretical level integrates a dual model: Moran’s “cultural iceberg theory” distinguishes the surface representation (products/practices) and deep core (concepts/values) of culture [17]; Zhang and Li’s analytical framework deconstructs presentation forms (products, practices, figures, concepts, communities) and presentation methods (carrier location, explicit/implicit intensity) [18]. The methodological level adopts the operationalization principle of content analysis to ensure objectivity.

This three-dimensional analysis framework contains three mutually exclusive dimensions (see Table 1).

Dimension 1 (Type of Cultural Content): Classified according to era attributes. Traditional culture codes heritage formed “before 1949” (e.g., oracle bone inscriptions in Required 1 Unit 5 “Chinese Characters”); modern culture codes contemporary Chinese development achievements “after 1949” (e.g., the social significance of shared bicycles in Required 2

Unit 4 exercises).

Table 1. Three-Dimensional Analytical Framework

Cultural Content Type	Traditional Culture	Modern Culture
Cultural Presentation Form	Cultural products; Cultural practices; Cultural figures; Cultural concepts; Cultural communities	
Cultural Presentation Mode	Carrier location (text/section/image/background/activity); Explicit/implicit intensity (high/medium/low intensity)	

Dimension 2 (Form of Cultural Presentation): The five forms of Zhang et al. [18] are adopted. Cultural products refer to tangible entities; cultural practices refer to specific behavioral patterns; cultural figures must be named and representative; cultural concepts require clear expression of values; cultural communities require identification of specific groups.

Dimension 3 (Mode of Cultural Presentation): Dual coding system. The carrier location is divided into five categories (see Table 2); the explicit/implicit intensity adopts a three-level weight: high intensity (8-10) for single cultural text; medium intensity (4-7) for cultural knowledge sections; low intensity (1-3) for implicit background information.

Table 2. Definition and Examples of Cultural Presentation Carriers (adapted from [18])

Carrier	Operational Definition	Example from PEP Textbook
Cultural text	Thematic listening/reading/video material	Required 1 Unit 5 reading “The Chinese Writing System”
Cultural knowledge section	Independent cultural column (e.g., Cultural Corner)	Required 2 Unit 1 “Peking Opera” special feature
Image/epigraph	Illustrations and epigraphs containing cultural elements	Paper-cutting picture with caption “Paper-cutting: 1,500-year history”
Background cultural information	Names of people/places/terms to aid understanding	Footnote “Qin Shi Huang, first emperor”
Activity/exercise	Task instructions containing culture	Writing task “Introduce the Dragon Boat Festival”

Coding takes an independent cultural expression in the textbook as the smallest unit of analysis (e.g., a paragraph, a picture, or an exercise question), performing three-dimensional marking.

What are the characteristics of the distribution of Chinese cultural content in the compulsory textbooks of PEP high school English in the type dimension? (2) What are the frequency and structure of the presentation forms of Chinese culture in the textbooks? (3) Through which carriers and explicit/implicit intensities is Chinese culture presented, and what tendencies and potential problems exist in the design of presentation modes?

4. Research Methods

4.1 Research Design

This study adopts content analysis to deconstruct the characteristics of cultural presentation in textbooks through systematic coding and quantitative statistics, supplemented by qualitative case interpretation [19]. The research design is based on a three-dimensional framework, strictly following the cultural classification requirements of the curriculum standards and the carrier explicit/implicit model of Zhang and Li [18]. The PEP (2019) English compulsory textbooks 1-3 were selected because of their basic coverage of all high school students, the systematic nature of the three textbooks (15 units in total), and their timeliness in fully implementing the national cultural strategy.

4.3 Data Collection

Data collection was completed by page-by-page retrieval: first, systematically sort out the texts, exercises, illustrations, and annotations of the three textbooks to identify all explicit and implicit Chinese cultural content; second, take the independent cultural expression as the smallest unit of analysis (e.g., a text paragraph, a single picture, or an exercise question), cross-check by the team, remove duplicate and invalid items, extract a total of 87 valid items, and establish a three-dimensional database containing volume, unit, page number, and content description, providing a basis for subsequent coding and statistical analysis.

4.2 Research Questions

This study attempts to answer three questions: (1)

5. Findings

This section will deeply explore the presentation of Chinese culture in the three compulsory textbooks of PEP (2019) high school English from three aspects: the type of Chinese culture content, the form of Chinese culture presentation, and the mode of Chinese culture presentation.

5.1 Types of Chinese Cultural Content

The three PEP compulsory textbooks contain a total of 87 items of Chinese culture, showing an obvious type imbalance: traditional culture dominates (60 items, 68.9%), focusing on cultural heritage (e.g., T1 U5 Chinese character system, T2 U1 ancient building protection) and festivals and customs (e.g., T3 U1 Lantern Festival); modern culture is second (27 items, 31.1%), focusing on scientific and technological achievements (e.g., T3 U5 aerospace engineering) and social practices (e.g., T2 U4 mobile payment). The distribution by volume shows a decreasing trend: Required 1 (T1) accounts for 43.7%, Required 2 (T2) 28.7%, Required 3 (T3) 27.6%. The proportion of modern culture increases in T2-T3 (35.2% → 28.4%), but the content is fragmented: for example, “Wenchuan Earthquake” (T1 p.56) only appears as a grammar exercise sentence (implicit/weight 1), not associated with the spiritual connotation of disaster response.

5.2 Forms of Chinese Culture Presentation

In terms of the presentation forms of Chinese culture, the textbooks attach the most importance to cultural products and cultural practices, followed by cultural concepts, with cultural communities and cultural figures accounting for much less than the first two. Among the five forms, cultural products (35 items, 40.2%) and cultural practices (28 items, 32.2%) account for the highest proportion, mostly belonging to the material and behavioral levels; cultural concepts (12 items, 13.8%) and cultural communities (7 items, 8.0%) are weak, and cultural figures (5 items, 5.8%) are the least. Cross-analysis reveals significant type preferences: traditional culture focuses on products and practices, light on concepts (only 8 items); modern culture focuses on practices and products, but the interpretation of concepts is weak; cultural concepts exist only in traditional and modern culture, and 75% are implicit low-intensity presentations. Cultural communities are limited to ethnic minorities, not involving modern communities such as urban

youth and rural groups.

5.3 Modes of Chinese Culture Presentation

The modes of Chinese culture presentation are explored in terms of carrier distribution and explicit/implicit intensity.

5.3.1 Carrier distribution

Carriers are dominated by cultural texts (32 items, 36.8%) and activities/exercises (25 items, 28.7%), but the utility is significantly differentiated: texts mostly carry high-intensity content (75% weight ≥ 8), such as T1 U5 “The Development History of Chinese Characters” (weight 10); 73% of activities/exercises are implicit low-intensity, such as T1 p.45 “Table Tennis Survey” (language practice/weight 1); cultural knowledge sections (3 items) are rare but prominent in depth, such as T2 U1 “Protection of the Great Wall” (weight 6) analyzing cultural significance.

5.3.2 Explicit/Implicit intensity

The overall intensity mean is 5.2 (SD=3.1). Explicit items (weight ≥ 4) account for 59.8%, but there are three contradictions: (1) high-intensity carriers are not fully utilized: for example, only 3 knowledge sections deeply analyze cultural concepts; (2) implicit potential is not developed: T1 p.39 “Yao Ming discussion” (implicit/weight 2) only requires listing stars, not extending to “sportsmanship”; (3) intensity fault: in T3 U5, Yang Liwei’s biography (weight 10) and “Tiangong Space Station” background information (weight 1) are fragmented, cutting off systematic cognition.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Using a three-dimensional analytical framework of type-form-mode, this study systematically explored the content distribution, presentation forms, and presentation modes of Chinese culture in the PEP (2019) high school English compulsory textbooks 1-3. The results not only reveal the structural characteristics of the textbooks in the selection and expression of cultural content but also point out several problems and room for improvement in the current presentation system.

First, in terms of content type, the presentation of traditional Chinese culture in the textbooks is clearly dominant, accounting for 68.9%, while the proportion of modern culture has increased (31.1%), but there are still problems of fragmentation and superficiality. This imbalance reflects a bias in the selection of types, which

fails to fully respond to the educational goals of the English curriculum in the new era.

Second, from the perspective of cultural presentation forms, the textbooks pay much more attention to cultural products and cultural practices than to cultural concepts, cultural communities, and cultural figures, reflecting a structural feature that focuses on material-level culture and weakens spiritual-level culture. In particular, the lack and implicit presentation of cultural concepts mean that the educational function of the textbooks in terms of value guidance has not been fully realized, making it difficult to truly promote students' identification with and internalization of the core values of Chinese culture.

Third, regarding the mode of cultural presentation, although cultural texts carry a large amount of key cultural content as high-intensity carriers, potential sections such as activities/exercises have not fully realized their teaching functions, mostly staying at the level of language practice and failing to achieve in-depth exploration of cultural content and knowledge internalization. In addition, auxiliary carriers such as background information and images/epigraphs generally suffer from symbolization and fragmentation, unable to effectively activate students' interest in and thinking about Chinese culture.

In summary, although the PEP (2019) high school English textbooks have responded to the national cultural strategy to a certain extent and possess basic Chinese cultural input, they still have significant deficiencies in terms of cultural type diversity, transmission of value concepts, and transformation of teaching functions. In the future, efforts should be made to balance the types of cultural content, explicitly construct cultural concepts, expand the functions of teaching carriers, and enhance teachers' cultural literacy.

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