

# Analysis and Optimization Suggestions on Cultural Content in PEP Senior High School English Textbooks

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**Abstract:** As a key medium for cultural communication, the arrangement of cultural content in English textbooks directly affects the construction of learners' cultural cognition and the development of their intercultural critical thinking abilities. Taking the 2019 People's Education Press (PEP) Senior High School English Compulsory Volumes 1–3 as research samples, this study systematically analyzes the cultural content of the textbooks using content analysis, integrating dimensions such as cultural regions, presentation forms, positions, methods and intensity. The research finds that in terms of regional sources, the cultural content of the textbooks is dominated by target-language country cultures and Chinese culture, with a relatively low proportion of international culture and cultures of other countries. In terms of presentation forms, cultural products and cultural practices take the lead, while cultural figures, cultural concepts and cultural communities account for a small proportion. In terms of presentation methods, cultural texts are the main carrier, supplemented by knowledge sections, pictures/quotations and activities/exercises, but background cultural information is insufficient.

**Keywords:** PEP Senior High School English Textbooks; Cultural Content; Regional Source; Presentation Form; Presentation Method

## 1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of globalization and multicultural integration, English textbooks serve not only as carriers of linguistic knowledge but also as important media for cultivating cultural awareness. The *National Curriculum Standard for Senior High School English (2017 Edition, Revised 2020)* explicitly incorporates cultural knowledge into curriculum content, emphasizing the understanding of

cultural connotations and the consolidation of cultural confidence in language learning. The 2019 PEP Senior High School English Compulsory Volumes 1–3 implement the requirements of the curriculum standard, and the arrangement of their cultural content directly shapes students' cultural cognition and intercultural communicative competence. Taking these textbooks as the research object, this paper systematically analyzes the characteristics and internal logic of the arrangement of their cultural content from dimensions such as cultural regions, presentation forms, positions, methods and intensity. It aims to clarify the strengths and weaknesses of the textbooks in fulfilling the goal of cultivating cultural awareness, provide data support for textbook revision, and offer references for teachers to optimize cultural teaching and enhance students' cultural literacy.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Foreign Research on Cultural Content in Secondary School Foreign Language Textbooks

Since the 1990s, international scholars have extensively studied the categorization of cultural content in English textbooks. Kachru advanced the Concentric Circle Theory, classifying nations into inner, outer and expanding circles according to their relationship with English [1]. The inner circle comprises English-speaking core countries; the outer circle includes nations where English serves as a second or official language; the expanding circle consists of countries where English is learned as a foreign language. Cortazzi and Jin classified cultural content into three categories: native culture (learner's own background), target-language culture (English-speaking contexts), and world culture (non-English-speaking nations) [2]. Ookawa's analysis of Japanese high school English textbooks revealed notable biases: overemphasis on American and Japanese

cultures and neglect of other regions. He advocated more diverse cultural input to enhance students' intercultural communication [3].

Beyond classification, scholars have explored the language–culture nexus. Edward Hall argued that language and culture are inseparable [4]. Stern developed language teaching frameworks integrating formal, sociolinguistic and sociocultural dimensions, embedding socioculture as a dynamic component in foreign language pedagogy [5]. Seelye outlined cultural learning objectives, instructional strategies and assessment approaches [6]. Gouin pioneered the integration of culture and language teaching, highlighting culture's central role in language education [7]. Shrum and Glisan noted that learners often lack contextually meaningful linguistic input, hindering the conversion of knowledge into spontaneous communication [8].

## 2.2 Domestic Research on Cultural Content in Secondary School English Textbooks

Chinese scholars have similarly examined the language–culture relationship. Shu Dingfang and Zhuang Zhixiang stressed that language is culture's core component and vehicle, as well as its foundation and context [9].

With the development of domestic and foreign theories on the classification of cultural content in English textbooks, Chinese scholars have begun to analyze the cultural content in domestic English textbooks. By comparing and analyzing the cultural content of old and new editions of senior high school English textbooks, Tang Shuang found that the new textbooks have increased the proportion of native culture and world culture, and textbook compilation has attached greater importance to communicative culture [10]. Lu Dimin analyzed the 2007 senior high school English textbooks from the perspective of layout proportion in cultural selection and configuration, and found that the cultural content of NSEFC lacks national culture and comparative content [11]. He Lifan conducted a statistical analysis of Chinese culture in FLTRP senior high school textbooks, revealing that the integration of Chinese culture prioritizes exploratory culture over normative and modeling culture, target-language culture over Chinese culture, and cultural input over cultural output, with a lack of cultural evaluation [12]. Zhang Hanjiao's research on five sets of college English textbooks (*Integrated Course*

and *Reading and Writing Course*) found that these textbooks are characterized by a low proportion and outdated nature of Chinese culture, with cultures other than British and American being marginalized [13]. Jia Tonghui and Hu Meixin pointed out the imbalance of cultural teaching content. Although the cultural content in the reading texts of the compulsory modules of PEP senior high school English textbooks covers all nine types of cultural content proposed by Byram's cultural classification theory, content related to social identity and groups, beliefs and behaviors, and national history is abundant, while content related to social interaction and social and political systems is relatively scarce [14]. Sun Tai highlighted the phenomenon of “aphasia of traditional Chinese culture” among Chinese English majors and its characteristics, and proposed paths for constructing cultural confidence [15].

Existing research has made progress in both theory and empirical practice, but it still has two major limitations. First, the dimensions of cultural analysis are single and lack systematic integration. Second, there is limited research on the intensity of various cultural content, making it difficult to accurately reflect the emphasis placed on cultural arrangement in textbooks.

Adapting Zhang Hong's coding framework to senior high school English textbook analysis, this study integrates a multi-dimensional analytical framework covering cultural regions, presentation forms, positions and methods, and calculates intensity by multiplying weight and frequency. It not only improves the systematicity of cultural content analysis but also strengthens the guidance for teaching practice, providing a new empirical approach for research on cultural content in senior high school English textbooks.

## 3. Research Design

### 3.1 Research Questions

Based on the research content, this study attempts to answer the following three questions:(1) What are the regional sources of cultural content in PEP senior high school English compulsory textbooks?(2) What are the characteristics and intensity of the presentation forms of cultural content in PEP senior high school English compulsory textbooks?(3) What are the characteristics and intensity of the presentation methods of cultural content in PEP

senior high school English compulsory textbooks?

### 3.2 Research Object

This study takes the 2019 PEP Senior High School English Compulsory Volumes 1–3 as the research object. Including the Welcome Unit, these three volumes consist of 16 units, each centered on a specific theme and containing rich cultural elements. During the research, all texts in the Compulsory Volumes 1–3 are systematically analyzed, including but not limited to unit introductions, main texts, captions for illustrations, and reading passages in after-class exercises.

### 3.3 Research Method

This study adopts content analysis. Based on Zhang Hong's coding framework for textbook cultural analysis and in line with the requirements of the Curriculum Standard for cultural awareness, it systematically codes and analyzes the cultural content of the textbooks from dimensions such as cultural regions, presentation forms, positions, methods and intensity. The coding framework example is shown in Table 1. Excel's subtotal function is used to calculate the proportion and comprehensive intensity of each dimension, and tables are drawn for intuitive presentation.

**Table 1. Example of Textbook Analysis Coding Framework**

Content	Region	Country	Presentation Form	Presentation Position	Textbook	Page	Presentation Method	Weight	Frequency	Intensity
Xin Qiji's poem <i>Qingyu Case-Lantern Festival</i>	Learner's Native Culture	China (Traditional Culture)	Cultural Product	Unit Introduction	T3	P1	Explicit - Single Cultural Text	10	1	10
Picture of Chinese people performing dragon dances	Learner's Native Culture	China (Traditional Culture)	Cultural Practice	Unit Introduction	T3	P1	Explicit - Picture	2	1	2
Rio Carnival	Culture of Other Countries	Non-English-speaking countries: Brazil	Cultural Practice	Listening and Speaking	T3	P2-3	Implicit - Multicultural (Equal)	3	2	6

## 4. Research Findings

After systematically sorting out the research background, objectives, literature and design, this paper clarifies the research path for analyzing the logic of cultural content arrangement in the 2019 PEP Senior High School English Compulsory Volumes 1–3. After a comprehensive analysis of the textbook texts, this section systematically presents the regional sources, presentation forms and methods of the cultural content of the textbooks in response to the research questions.

### 4.1 Regional Sources of Cultural Content

#### 4.1.1 Coding Data Presentation

In terms of regional sources, target-language country cultures and Chinese culture constitute the main components, while the proportion of international culture and cultures of other countries is relatively low. The specific presentation intensity and proportion are shown in Table 2.

Learners' native culture (Chinese culture) has the highest intensity in the Compulsory Volumes 1–3, with a score of 282, accounting for 32.90%. Chinese culture encompasses traditional culture, revolutionary culture and modern culture, building a comprehensive and three-dimensional

cognitive system of Chinese culture for students. Among them, traditional Chinese culture has an intensity of 173, accounting for 20.19%, reflecting the textbooks' emphasis on inheriting and promoting fine traditional Chinese culture. Content such as Laozi's famous quotes, Xin Qiji's poems and traditional Chinese festival customs helps students enhance cultural confidence and deepen their understanding and recognition of native culture. Revolutionary Chinese culture has an intensity of 6. Although it accounts for a small proportion, it is an indispensable part of Chinese culture, enabling students to remember history and inherit the revolutionary spirit. Modern Chinese culture has an intensity of 103, accounting for 12.02%, showcasing China's development and progress in modern society and allowing students to understand contemporary China from a cultural perspective.

Target-language country cultures rank second with an intensity of 281, accounting for 32.79%. Among them, the cultural content of the United States and the United Kingdom has relatively high intensities, reaching 122 and 142 respectively, accounting for 14.24% and 16.57%. The two together account for 32.79%. This indicates that the textbooks attach great importance to the cultures of English-speaking

countries in content arrangement, helping students understand the linguistic habits, social customs and values of English-speaking countries and laying a foundation for intercultural communication.

**Table 2. Presentation Intensity and Proportion of Cultures from Different Regions**

Region	Country	Intensity	Proportion of Intensity
Target-Language Country Cultures	United States	122	14.24%
	UK	142	16.57%
	Canada	17	1.98%
	Subtotal	281	32.79%
International Culture	-	131	15.29%
Chinese Culture	China (Traditional Culture)	173	20.19%
	China (Revolutionary Culture)	6	0.70%
	China (Modern Culture)	103	12.02%
	Subtotal	282	32.90%
Cultures of Other Countries	Egypt	8	0.93%
	Brazil	12	1.40%
	Germany	24	2.80%
	France	10	1.17%
	Russia (Former Soviet Union)	28	3.27%
	Japan	11	1.28%
	South Africa	6	0.70%
	Spain	2	0.23%
	Greece	1	0.12%
	...	...	...
Subtotal	102	11.90%	
Total	Total	857	100%

International culture ranks third with an intensity of 131, accounting for 15.29%. It includes content such as international organizations and global cultural phenomena, enabling students to recognize the commonalities and differences of culture from a global perspective and cultivate a global awareness and international vision. The introduction of such cultural content enriches the cultural diversity of the textbooks, breaks students' single cognition of world culture, and allows them to view cultural differences between countries and regions with a more open

and inclusive mindset, fostering intercultural understanding and respect.

Cultures of other countries involve multiple countries, with a total intensity of 102, accounting for 11.90%, ranking fourth. The intensity of cultural content varies significantly across countries—for example, Russia (Former Soviet Union) scores 28, Germany 24, while Greece only scores 1. This distribution reflects that the selection of cultural content from other countries in the textbooks comprehensively considers factors such as a country's cultural influence and relevance to English learning, helping students broaden their international vision and understand the diversity of world culture.

#### 4.1.2 Characteristics and Implications

Against the backdrop of globalization, promoting cultural communication and exchange has become an important mission of education. The extensive presentation of target-language country cultures in the textbooks allows students to access and understand the cultures of English-speaking countries and break cultural barriers. The rich content of Chinese culture equips students with the linguistic and knowledge reserves to spread Chinese culture to the world, promoting Chinese culture globally. Meanwhile, the appropriate introduction of cultures of other countries and international culture broadens students' global vision, helps them recognize the diversity of world culture, cultivates a global awareness and international vision, and enables them to better adapt to the development needs of the global era.

The dominant position of Chinese culture enhances cultural confidence. In the context of globalization, as an important carrier of cultural communication, English textbooks can help students deeply understand the essence of their native culture while mastering foreign languages, avoiding the phenomenon of "cultural aphasia" in intercultural communication. The relatively high proportion of British and American culture fully considers the historical connection between English as an international language and British and American countries, helping students understand the cultural logic behind the English language and improve the accuracy and appropriateness of language use. The appropriate introduction of cultures of other countries and international culture further broadens students' global vision, cultivates their mind to embrace diverse cultures, and aligns

with the educational requirements under the “Community with a Shared Future for Mankind” concept.

This regional distribution enables students to gain in-depth cognition of British, American and Chinese cultures. Students can learn about the social life, values and cultural traditions of British and American countries through the textbooks, while enhancing their pride and recognition of native culture. However, the relatively low proportion of cultures of other countries in the textbooks may lead to one-sided cognition of world culture among students, making it difficult for them to fully understand the diversity of global culture. Students may form the stereotype that “English culture equals British and American culture”, ignoring the rich

cultural connotations of other countries and regions, which is not conducive to cultivating students’ global cultural vision and intercultural understanding ability.

## 4.2 Presentation Forms of Cultural Content

### 4.2.1 Coding Data Presentation

The presentation forms of cultural content mainly include cultural products, cultural practices, cultural figures, cultural concepts and cultural communities. The distribution of presentation forms and intensity of cultures from different regions in the textbooks is shown in Table 3. Among them, cultural products and cultural practices dominate, with total intensities of 375 and 350 respectively, significantly higher than other presentation forms.

**Table 3. Presentation Forms and Proportion of Cultures from Different Regions**

Form	Region				Total Intensity
	Target-Language Country Cultures	Chinese Culture	Cultures of Other Countries	International Culture	
Cultural Product	114	141	97	23	375
Cultural Practice	95	111	68	76	350
Cultural Figure	9	23	16	0	48
Cultural Concept	8	6	6	25	45
Cultural Community	10	1	1	7	19

In terms of cultural products, the intensities of target-language country cultures, Chinese culture and cultures of other countries are 114, 141 and 97 respectively, with international culture scoring 23, totaling 375. Cultural products cover literary works, artistic creations, historical relics, etc. Through these concrete cultural carriers, students can intuitively appreciate the charm of different cultures. For example, the PEP textbooks introduce target-language cultural products such as the script of *The Million Pound Bank Note* and the British poem *If*, as well as Chinese cultural products such as Chinese calligraphy and Peking opera, enriching students’ cultural cognition.

In terms of cultural practices, the total intensity is 350, with target-language country cultures, Chinese culture, cultures of other countries and international culture scoring 95, 111, 68 and 76 respectively. Cultural practices include festival celebrations, traditional customs, social and cultural activities, etc. By participating in relevant language learning activities, students can gain a deeper experience and understanding of cultural connotations. For example, the presentation of cultural practices such as the Rio Carnival and Chinese Lantern Festival customs

in the textbooks allows students to experience the unique atmosphere of different cultures in language learning.

In terms of cultural figures, the total intensity is 48, with Chinese culture scoring 23, target-language country cultures 9, and cultures of other countries 16. The introduction of cultural figures enables students to understand the cultural background and values behind them through their experiences and achievements. For example, the stories of figures such as Lin Qiaozhi and Norman Bethune convey the spirit of benevolent medical practice and internationalism.

In terms of cultural concepts, the total intensity is 45, with international culture scoring 25, a relatively high proportion in this dimension. The presentation of cultural concepts helps students understand the ways of thinking and value orientations of different cultures, fostering critical thinking and intercultural understanding ability.

The cultural community dimension has a relatively low total intensity of 19. The presentation of cultural communities can help students understand the lifestyles and social structures of different cultural groups, enhancing

their awareness of cultural diversity, but it accounts for a small proportion in the textbooks and needs further strengthening.

#### 4.2.2 Characteristics and Analysis

Cultural products and cultural practices dominate as the main presentation forms of cultural content in the textbooks, while cultural figures, cultural concepts and cultural communities have relatively low total intensities of 48, 45 and 19 respectively, accounting for a small proportion in the textbooks. The distribution of presentation forms is significantly uneven, focusing on cultural products and cultural practices, with insufficient exploration of dimensions such as cultural figures, cultural concepts and cultural communities that can deeply reveal cultural connotations.

Current English education emphasizes cultivating students' language application ability and cultural awareness. The cultural products and practices in the textbooks can intuitively present the cultural scenarios of language use, closely integrating with language teaching and aligning with teaching objectives. By analyzing the language expressions in literary works and understanding the dialogues in festival customs, students can learn and use English in specific contexts. In contrast, teaching content related to cultural figures, cultural concepts and cultural communities is relatively difficult, requiring students to have certain abstract thinking and cultural understanding abilities, hence their relatively low proportion in senior high school English teaching, which focuses on developing language skills.

The extensive presentation of cultural products and practices effectively stimulates students' learning interest. Rich and diverse literary stories and interesting festival customs make English learning vivid and engaging, enhancing students' enthusiasm and initiative in learning. Meanwhile, in accessing such cultural content, students can learn authentic language expressions and understand the use of language in real cultural scenarios, which helps improve language learning effectiveness and enhance language application ability. However, the low proportion of cultural figures, cultural concepts and cultural communities leads students to understand culture mostly at the superficial level, making it difficult for them to explore the spiritual connotations and social structures behind culture. Insufficient interpretation of cultural concepts tends to result in students'

superficial understanding of different cultural value systems, which is not conducive to cultivating their critical cultural thinking and in-depth understanding of culture.

### 4.3 Presentation Methods of Cultural Content

#### 4.3.1 Coding Data Presentation

The presentation methods of cultural content in the Compulsory Volumes 1–3 mainly include cultural texts, cultural knowledge sections, pictures/quotations, background cultural information and activities/exercises (including cultural expression, cultural understanding and language practice). Table 4 clearly presents the intensity distribution of various presentation methods for cultures from different regions in the three volumes. Among them, cultural texts dominate, with a total intensity of 515, a prominent proportion among all presentation methods. The intensities of target-language country cultures, Chinese culture, cultures of other countries and international culture presented through cultural texts are 178, 162, 124 and 51 respectively, covering a wide range of literary works and narrative texts, providing students with abundant cultural reading materials.

Cultural knowledge sections have a total intensity of 106, systematically conveying cultural information to students through dedicated knowledge introduction sections. Pictures/quotations have a total intensity of 85, attracting students' attention and assisting their understanding of cultural content through intuitive picture displays or brief introductory remarks. Background cultural information has a total intensity of only 11, a relatively low proportion in the textbooks, mainly in the form of supplementary explanations. Activities/exercises have a total intensity of 116, with cultural expression scoring 59, cultural understanding 26 and language practice 31. Through diverse forms of practice, students consolidate cultural knowledge and enhance their language application and cultural understanding abilities in practice.

#### 4.3.2 Characteristics and Analysis

The cultural content in the English Compulsory Volumes 1–3 is presented in diverse ways, with rich texts providing core cultural input, cultural knowledge sections systematically sorting out key points, pictures/quotations being intuitive, and activities/exercises facilitating knowledge transformation, while background cultural

information accounts for a small proportion. The teaching objectives align with the laws of language learning and meet students' cognitive and learning needs. Its positive impact lies in

promoting the coordinated development of students' linguistic and cultural literacy, but it also has limitations.

**Table 4. Presentation Methods and Proportion of Cultures from Different Regions**

Method		Region			Total Intensity	
		Target-Language Country Cultures	Chinese Culture	Cultures of Other Countries		International Culture
Cultural Text		178	162	124	51	515
Cultural Knowledge		29	47	24	6	106
Picture/Quotation		30	19	10	26	85
Background Cultural Information		2	4	5	0	11
Activity/ Exercise	Cultural Expression	6	21	7	25	59
	Cultural Understanding	0	9	4	13	26
	Language Practice	11	15	3	2	31

The extensive use of cultural texts provides students with abundant language input, helping develop their reading ability and language sense. In reading cultural texts, students are exposed to authentic language expressions and diverse sentence structures, improving their language proficiency. Meanwhile, through the rich cultural content in texts, students can gain in-depth understanding of the cultural backgrounds, values and lifestyles of different regions, enhancing cultural awareness. Cultural knowledge sections help students construct a systematic body of cultural knowledge, pictures/quotations stimulate learning interest, and activities/exercises enable students to transform learned knowledge into language application and cultural understanding abilities through practice, promoting the coordinated development of students' linguistic and cultural literacy.

As important carriers of linguistic knowledge and cultural connotations, cultural texts conform to the "input-internalization-output" law in language learning. Extensive input of cultural texts can effectively improve students' language perception and cultural understanding abilities. Cultural knowledge sections are designed to help students systematically sort out cultural key points, aligning with the need to construct a systematic knowledge system in language learning. The design of activities/exercises also revolves around the laws of language learning, consolidating knowledge through practice and enabling students to apply what they have learned. However, insufficient background information may lead to superficial cultural understanding among students, and uneven intensity of activities and exercises may result in

unbalanced ability development.

## 5. Suggestions

### 5.1 Optimize Content Structure

To address the issue of insufficient background cultural information that tends to result in superficial cultural understanding among students, textbooks should increase the proportion of background cultural information. Embed cultural background columns in cultural texts to help students understand the underlying logic of cultural phenomena. Optimize cultural knowledge sections by transforming scattered cultural key points into cultural context maps, guiding students to establish systematic cognition. Meanwhile, balance the intensity of cultural expression, cultural understanding and language practice in activities and exercises, and design more intercultural comparison and cultural phenomenon critical thinking tasks—such as debate topics comparing differences in Chinese and Western family values—to cultivate students' critical thinking.

### 5.2 Dynamic Textbook Updates

Establish a dynamic update mechanism for textbook cultural content, regularly incorporating emerging cultural phenomena and global hot topics. For example, integrate cutting-edge content such as artificial intelligence ethics and social media culture into cultural texts, and guide students to reflect on the interactive relationship between culture and technology through activities and exercises such as debates and case studies. Meanwhile, conduct systematic evaluations and adjustments of textbook presentation methods based on student

feedback and teaching practice effects, ensuring that they always align with educational needs and students' cognitive development laws.

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