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Analysis of Integration and Representation of Chinese Culture in Higher Vocational English Textbooks

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Abstract

This study applies the *Framework for Analyzing the Representation of Cultures in English Textbooks* to conduct a textual analysis of Chinese cultural content in a representative higher vocational English textbook and collects data from English teachers who use the textbook through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The main findings are as follows: first, there is a significant imbalance in the representation of different types of Chinese culture, with advanced socialist culture accounting for a large share and revolutionary culture represented to a very limited extent; second, in terms of presentation intensity, the portrayal of cultural products is the most prominent, followed by cultural persons and cultural practices, while portrayals of cultural perspectives and cultural communities are comparatively lower; third, the modes of presenting Chinese culture are diverse, with explicit and implicit presentations coexisting in multiple concrete forms, but overall explicit presentation predominates. Building upon these findings, the study proposes a set of strategies to optimize the presentation of Chinese culture in higher vocational English textbooks by balancing the presentation of three types of Chinese culture, balancing the presentation of explicit and implicit culture, highlighting the characteristics of intercultural comparison, and innovating in the mode of cultural presentation.

Keywords

Higher Vocational English Textbooks; Chinese cultural representation; Textbook optimization strategies

1. Introduction

In recent years, cultural awareness cultivation in foreign language teaching has emerged as a key concern in global educational circles. Early research by Western scholars highlighted the pivotal role of cultural cognition in foreign language learning, and this view soon gained attention among Chinese researchers. As the phenomenon of "Chinese cultural aphasia" has become increasingly evident, scholarly attention has shifted toward reexamining the role of native culture in English language teaching and advancing systematic inquiry in this area. Notably, foundational policy documents such as the *English Curriculum Standards for Higher Vocational Education (Specialist Level)* and the *College English Teaching Guidelines* explicitly emphasize cultivating students' cultural identity, enhancing cultural confidence, and promoting the international dissemination of China's outstanding cultural traditions. These directives underscore a strategic, state-level commitment to strengthening native cultural awareness through

language education.

Although sustained curriculum reform and instructional practice have led to the widespread inclusion of Chinese cultural elements in English textbooks, significant challenges still exist in practical implementation. A primary concern involves the conceptual ambiguity surrounding how Chinese culture is represented, as the field currently lacks a coherent analytical framework. This theoretical gap is compounded by uncertainties regarding whether the scope and depth of such content adequately align with the objectives of the revised curriculum standards. Perhaps most critically, there remains a dearth of empirical research on the effective pedagogical use of these resources, which underscores a persistent disconnect between curricular intent and classroom practice.

The *English Curriculum Standards for Higher Vocational Education (Specialist Level, 2021 Edition)* (hereafter referred to as the *New Curriculum Standards*) designates intercultural communication as a core dimension of English disciplinary competence. The document stresses that English instruction at the higher vocational level should enable students to develop strong cultural confidence, articulate Chinese narratives, and convey Chinese culture in English. Following the release of the *New Curriculum Standards* in April 2021, mainstream higher vocational English textbooks in China underwent revisions to incorporate additional Chinese cultural content. However, there remains a lack of sufficient empirical and evaluative research addressing how Chinese culture is integrated and presented in these textbooks, as well as whether the quantity and quality of such content meet national expectations for fostering cultural awareness, identity, and cultural inheritance among higher vocational students. Against this background, systematic research on the integration and representation of Chinese culture in higher vocational English textbooks is both timely and necessary, carrying substantial practical significance and social value.

2. Literature Review

International research on the cultural analysis of foreign language textbooks can be traced back to the 1960s; however, it has gained sustained scholarly attention only over the past decade. Moran's (2009) cultural analysis framework conceptualizes culture across five interrelated dimensions—cultural products, cultural practices, cultural perspectives, cultural persons, and cultural communities—and has since served as a key theoretical foundation for studies on cultural representation in instructional materials. Drawing on Yuen's (2011) typology of cultural categories, which includes cultural practices, products, perspectives, and persons, Keles and Yazan (2020) examined cultural representation in *New Headway*, an English textbook series published by Oxford University Press. Their analysis revealed that the imbalanced representation of cultures from different regions might shape learners' perceptions of multiculturalism. Nevertheless, much of the existing literature concentrates on the presence and distribution of cultural content, while comparatively little attention has been paid to the modes through which culture is presented. In addition, current analytical taxonomies remain insufficiently nuanced, pointing to the need for more refined and systematic inquiry.

Within the Chinese context, researchers have made meaningful progress in the analysis of cultural content in English textbooks. Zhang Hong and Li Xiaonan (2022), synthesizing the classification models proposed by Kachru and Nelson (1996) and Cortazzi and Jin (1999) and incorporating Moran's (2009) framework, developed a *Framework for Analyzing the Representation of Cultures in English Textbooks*. This framework addresses both the content and modes of cultural representation and further elaborates multiple sub-dimensions. In contrast to earlier studies that relied primarily on quantitative measures such as frequency counts and percentage distributions, this approach assigns differentiated weights to various representational modes, thereby enabling a more comprehensive and nuanced evaluation of cultural presentation. Such methodological advances have provided robust theoretical support for research on representational modes and have contributed to an expanding body of empirical findings. Applying this framework, Li Xiaonan (2022) analyzed the representation of Chinese culture in a senior high school English textbook series and found a predominant focus on inner-circle cultures and shared global culture, alongside a balanced inclusion of Chinese and international cultural elements. Similarly, studies by Tan Jia and Zhang Lu (2022) and Ge Nannan (2022) examined French and German language textbooks, respectively, revealing that French textbooks tend to privilege French national culture at the expense of other Francophone cultures, while representations of Chinese culture in German textbooks remain relatively limited and homogeneous.

Research on cultural representation in English textbooks in China has largely focused on undergraduate-level college English and secondary education, with comparatively limited attention given to higher vocational English textbooks. In particular, since the implementation of the *New Curriculum Standards* in 2021, empirical

investigations into the representation of Chinese culture in newly revised higher vocational English textbooks remain scarce. Existing studies typically adopt a single-method research design, most often employing quantitative text-based analyses grounded in established or self-constructed frameworks to measure the frequency of cultural content. While such approaches are effective in identifying patterns of representation, they are less capable of uncovering the deeper cultural meanings, values, and perspectives embedded in instructional texts. To address these limitations, the present study targets users of foundational higher vocational English textbooks published after the introduction of the *New Curriculum Standards* and adopts a mixed method that integrates quantitative and qualitative analyses. Through a longitudinal examination of how teachers utilize textbooks to implement Chinese culture instruction and cultivate cultural awareness, this study aims to provide a comprehensive account of how Chinese culture is operationalized in classroom practice, thereby offering empirically grounded implications for both textbook development and pedagogical implementation.

3. Research Design

This study investigates how Chinese culture is integrated and represented in *Basic English*, a core textbook designated under the "14th Five-Year Plan" and widely used in higher vocational institutions in a certain province following its revision in accordance with the 2021 *New Curriculum Standards*. Focusing on both the textbook and its users, the study combines systematic textual analysis with questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews to examine users' evaluations and expectations on the Chinese cultural content included in the textbook.

The research pursues two main objectives. The primary endeavor involves providing a comprehensive overview of the types, distribution, and representational modes of Chinese culture in the textbook, with a specific focus on identifying systemic imbalances or coverage gaps. The findings are intended to inform teachers' and students' effective use of Chinese cultural resources and support the more purposeful integration of Chinese culture into English language instruction. Building upon this empirical foundation, the research further seeks to identify the strengths and limitations of the textbook in terms of the selection and presentation of Chinese cultural content. On this basis, it proposes strategies for optimizing cultural representation in higher vocational English textbooks, thereby offering practical guidance for future textbook development.

The *Framework for Analyzing the Representation of Cultures in English Textbooks* (hereafter referred to as the *Framework*), developed by Zhang Hong and Li Xiaonan, is used to conduct a quantitative examination of both the content and modes of Chinese cultural representation. The *Framework* consists of two dimensions: representational content and representational mode. Representational content is classified along two axes—cultural region and cultural form. In terms of cultural region, the *Framework* distinguishes among target-language country culture, learners' native culture, other national cultures, and international culture. Given the focus of the present study, analysis of the regional dimension is confined to learners' native culture, namely Chinese culture, which is further categorized into traditional culture, revolutionary culture, and contemporary culture. From the perspective of cultural form, cultural content is divided into five categories: cultural products, cultural practices, cultural perspectives, cultural communities, and cultural persons. Modes of representation are grouped into five main types: cultural texts, cultural knowledge sections, images or quotations, background cultural information, and activities or exercises, each further differentiated by specific representational media. Each mode is assigned a weight ranging from 1 to 10, with higher weights allocated to modes that more explicitly emphasize or foreground cultural content. In accordance with the *Framework*, Chinese cultural elements are identified, analyzed, and coded on a page-by-page basis. The representational "intensity" of each mode is calculated using the formula "Intensity = Weight × Frequency", which allows for distinctions among representational modes and facilitates a more systematic assessment of the relative prominence and pedagogical function of different types of Chinese culture within the textbook.

The teacher questionnaire adopts a five-point Likert scale and addresses teachers' perceptions of cultural awareness cultivation, the representation of Chinese culture in the textbook, instructional strategies for teaching Chinese culture, and relevant influencing factors. Reliability and validity are tested using SPSS 27 to ensure methodological rigor. The questionnaire was distributed via Wenjuanxing to higher vocational English teachers who regularly use the textbook, resulting in 47 valid responses. Subsequently, two rounds of in-depth interviews were conducted with each participating teacher. The first round focused on action research, instructional practices related to Chinese culture, and the textbook's cultural content, while the second round examined teachers' specific reasons for textbook use. All the interviews were conducted in Mandarin, lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, and were transcribed verbatim.

4. Research Findings

4.1 The Content of Representation of Chinese Culture

The study findings indicate that this textbook places greater emphasis on presenting Chinese culture than previous editions; however, there is an imbalance in the types of Chinese culture represented. In the typology of Chinese cultural types presented, there is a pronounced emphasis on Socialist Advanced Culture (intensity 312, accounting for 59.43%), followed by Chinese Excellent Traditional Culture (intensity 197, accounting for 37.52%), while Revolutionary Culture has the lowest representation in this textbook (intensity 16, accounting for 3.05%). The textbook presents a rich array of Socialist Advanced Culture, including science and technology, renowned figures, economic policy and development, intercultural communication, sports, environmental protection and emission reduction, and education. For example, Text A in Unit 5 introduces China's mobile payment platforms, represented by Alipay and WeChat Pay, whose advantages of being "convenient and secure" have not only transformed the payment practices of Chinese people but also provided a Chinese blueprint for the development of the global digital economy. Text A and Text B in Unit 6, respectively, present the development of China's high-speed rail and the domestically produced C919 aircraft, with the aim of enabling students to apprehend the enormous achievements since China's reform and opening up, and to deepen their understanding of the new connotation of "Made in China," thereby stimulating students' national self-confidence and pride.

This textbook incorporates a certain number of elements from traditional Chinese culture, such as the Forbidden City, the Great Wall, and the Book of Songs. However, the typology of these elements remains relatively singular, and many representative classics reflecting thousands of years of Chinese civilization and wisdom, such as the Silk Road, the lunar calendar, and Peking Opera, have not been presented in the textbook, which constitutes a notable shortcoming. Revolutionary culture is an important component of Chinese culture. Yet, due to its association with certain ideological contents, textbook writers may consider it inappropriate to convey these materials to students, resulting in a disproportionately small proportion of revolutionary culture within the textbook. According to results from questionnaire surveys and interviews, teachers also perceive that revolutionary culture is relatively underrepresented, both in variety and in quantity, when compared with the other two categories of Chinese culture. The paucity of revolutionary culture content is evident and aligns with the findings of Zhang Hong and Li Xiaonan (2022) and Zhang Hong and Yu Rui (2020). For higher vocational college students, whose ideological consciousness is still at a crucial formative stage, traditional culture and revolutionary culture continue to have profound implications for shaping their values and perspectives in contemporary society. Going forward in textbook revisions, it would be feasible to more comprehensively enrich the diversity of Chinese traditional culture, for instance, by increasing coverage of folk arts and ancient philosophy. Simultaneously, an appropriate augmentation of revolutionary culture content, such as heroic figures and red heritage sites, could be considered.

4.2 The Form of Representation of Chinese Culture

The statistics for the dimension of cultural representation show that the content of Chinese culture in this textbook is primarily presented in the form of cultural products (intensity =273, accounting for 53.53%), a share that exceeds the combined intensity of the remaining four representation forms. The next most prominent categories are cultural persons (intensity =116, 22.74%) and cultural practices (intensity = 75, 14.71%). Cultural perspectives (intensity =36, 7.06%) and cultural communities are underrepresented, with cultural communities exhibiting the lowest presentation intensity (intensity = 10, 1.96%). A diversified range of cultural representations is more conducive to students' comprehensive and multifaceted engagement with exemplary Chinese culture; therefore, future revisions of the textbook should incorporate a variety of forms of cultural representation.

4.3 The Mode of Representation of Chinese Culture

According to the foregoing data analysis, the elements of Chinese culture in this textbook are mainly presented in explicit form, with implicit presentation serving a supplementary role. Specifically, explicit representation accounts for 60.72%, substantially higher than the 39.28% attributed to implicit representation. In the *Framework*, explicit representation is typically assigned greater weight, especially within the cultural discourse component, where the maximum score can reach 10, whereas the maximum for implicit representation in cultural discourse is only 5. This

finding further corroborates that the textbook tends to favor explicit representation in cultural discourse. From the results of surveys and interviews, teachers devote more instructional effort to content presented explicitly (e.g. cultural discourse), while cultural knowledge embedded in exercises presented through implicit means tends to be neglected. The survey data indicate that fewer than 50% of teachers report regularly explaining the cultural knowledge contained in the exercise sections. In classroom practice, teachers primarily rely on explicitly represented Chinese cultural content, with insufficient attention paid to the cultural elements within the exercise components. Notably, some teachers have noted that the alignment between pictorial materials used to operationalize abstract linguistic signs and the accompanying text and audio materials requires further improvement.

5. Discussion and Recommendations

Building upon these findings, the study proposes a set of strategies to optimize the presentation of Chinese culture in higher vocational English textbooks.

5.1 Balancing the Presentation of Three Types of Chinese Culture

To achieve a more equitable portrayal, the content should present socialist advanced culture, Chinese traditional culture, and revolutionary culture in a balanced manner. The presentation should actively reflect the spirit of the era and the major achievements in national development, guiding students to give due attention to the connotations and core values of Chinese culture, and encouraging students to value traditional culture, promote modern culture, and remain cognizant of revolutionary culture. Chinese traditional culture constitutes the root and essence of the Chinese nation; consequently, textbooks should proportionally increase their representation. From a macro perspective, the traditional cultural system encompasses multiple dimensions, including philosophical thought, language and script, artistic forms, and traditional crafts. During the process of compiling English textbooks for higher vocational education, it is advisable to foreground representative elements of Chinese traditional culture. For example, in the domain of traditional arts, the four canonical categories, including qin, qi, shu, and hua can be presented. The category "qin" encompasses traditional instruments such as the erhu and pipa; "qi" includes intellectual games such as Chinese chess; "shu" covers calligraphy and the Four Treasures of the Study (brush, ink, paper, and inkstone); and "hua" comprises painting forms, including landscape painting and Taijitu imagery. In literature, selections from classical works such as poetry and ci (lyric poetry) may be incorporated. Additionally, Traditional Chinese medicine, folk crafts, and myths and legends are also rich sources warranting deeper exploration.

5.2 Balancing the Presentation of Explicit and Implicit Culture

Textbooks should balance the presentation of explicit and implicit cultural content and enhance both the effectiveness and diversity of incorporating Chinese culture into implicit learning activities. On the one hand, the core values and essence of Chinese culture can be articulated explicitly through cultural texts and other overt instructional components. On the other hand, cultural meanings may be conveyed implicitly through indirect channels such as listening materials, video resources, visual design, and language-based tasks. By embedding Chinese cultural elements strategically within background information, vocabulary matching, grammar completion, translation exercises, and related activities, textbooks can promote the holistic permeation and integration of Chinese culture throughout the learning process.

5.3 Highlighting the Characteristics of Intercultural Comparison

In foreign language teaching at the stage of higher education, the intercultural orientation of instructional materials warrants sustained emphasis. As a mediating bridge between Chinese and Western cultures, higher vocational English textbooks should highlight cultural interaction by integrating Eastern and Western traditions, values, and social practices. Such an approach enables learners to identify, compare, and critically reflect on cultural differences between China and the West. Developing an intercultural perspective not only strengthens students' ability to explain local culture in a foreign language but also enhances their cultural confidence in international communication, thereby expanding global awareness and advancing intercultural communicative competence. From a curricular design perspective, textbook content may be organized into three interrelated modules: foundational language skill development, thematic exploration, and cultural and critical thinking cultivation. The first module emphasizes

linguistic accuracy and communicative competence; the second focuses on cultural transmission by enabling students to narrate Chinese experiences and stories through theme-based learning; and the third aims to foster critical thinking by guiding learners to conduct in-depth comparative analyses of Chinese and Western cultural materials. Through this process, students' cultural discernment is strengthened alongside the formation and refinement of values. For example, in a unit on living environments, a comparison between traditional Chinese courtyard residences and Western castle architecture can illuminate how distinct housing forms reflect different lifestyles and value systems. Similarly, in dialogues introducing the Year of the Dragon, comparing the dragon as an auspicious symbol in Chinese culture with its representation as a symbol of power or threat in Western traditions can help learners appreciate the divergent cultural meanings and value orientations associated with the same image across cultural contexts.

5.4 Innovating in the Mode of Cultural Presentation

Against the backdrop of AI-enhanced education, the mode through which Chinese culture is presented in higher vocational English textbooks requires systematic innovation. Existing textbooks tend to rely heavily on textual explanations and static images, with limited integration of multimedia resources such as audio and video. This relatively narrow range of presentational modes not only constrains learner engagement but also fails to support a multidimensional understanding of Chinese culture. To enhance both the pedagogical effectiveness and appeal of textbooks, it is recommended that textbook development incorporate big data analysis and multimodal technologies to construct a layered and diversified system of cultural presentation. Practical strategies may include the integration of multiple media formats and the design of comprehensive instructional modules centered on Chinese culture. For instance, in units addressing Chinese cultural heritage, virtual reality (VR) technology can be used to recreate historical scenes and provide immersive learning experiences. Furthermore, digital resource platforms should be fully utilized to extend cultural learning beyond the printed text. Aligned with instructional themes, textbooks may provide links to English translations of classical Chinese literature and to digitized research on Chinese culture by international scholars, thereby establishing a richer and more systematic learning resource framework for students.

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