

The Representation of Chinese Culture in the People's Education Press' Junior High School English Textbooks

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Abstract: The content of English textbooks plays a pivotal role in shaping students' cultural perceptions, especially for young learners. The junior high school English textbooks published by the People's Education Press (PEP), widely used across China, serve as a fundamental source of English language education for millions of students. An examination of how Chinese culture is presented within these textbooks is crucial for gaining insights into how young Chinese learners engage with their cultural heritage through the medium of English education. The paper aims to investigate the representation and portrayal of Chinese culture in the PEP junior high school English textbooks. Through a quantitative analysis of the content, types, dimensions and modes related to the Chinese culture within these textbooks, it endeavors to elucidate the distinct characteristics of the PEP junior high school English textbooks, identify any inadequacies in the cultural representation, and propose revision suggestions from the perspective of cultural representation.

Keywords: Chinese culture, PEP English textbooks for Junior High School Chinese students, cultural representation, cultural modes, cultural dimensions

1. Introduction

The importance of English language education in fostering cross-cultural understanding and enhancing intercultural communication has been increasingly acknowledged in the context of globalization. Consequently, the content of English textbooks holds a pivotal position in shaping students' perceptions of different cultures, both their own and others'. Specifically, in China, a country where a rich and diverse cultural heritage spans thousands of years, the representation of Chinese culture in English textbooks for junior high school students is of particular significance.

The junior high school English textbooks published by the People's Education Press (PEP) are extensively used in China, serving as a key source of English language education for millions of students. Therefore, an examination of how Chinese culture is presented within these textbooks is crucial for gaining insights into how young Chinese learners interact with their cultural heritage through the medium of English education.

The paper aims to investigate the representation and portrayal of Chinese culture in the PEP junior high school English textbooks. Through a quantitative analysis of the content, types, dimensions and modes related to the Chinese culture within these textbooks, it endeavors to explain the characteristics of the PEP junior high school English textbooks, identify its inadequacies, and propose revision suggestions from the perspective of cultural representation.

The research holds immense implications for enhancing the quality of English education in China. By scrutinizing the textbooks' Chinese cultural content, it can guide educators and policymakers in making informed decisions about how to best integrate native culture into foreign language teaching. This, in turn, will help students develop a deeper understanding of their own culture while also enhancing their ability to communicate effectively in a globalized context. Furthermore, the paper's emphasis on the importance of cultural representation in textbooks serves as a reminder of the need for balanced cultural perspectives in educational materials. As China continues to play an increasingly prominent role in the world, it is crucial that its cultural heritage and contributions are properly reflected in educational

materials, both domestic and international. The research may contribute to this effort by highlighting areas for improvement in the representation of Chinese culture in English textbooks.

2. Literature Review

Researches on the cultural representation in English language textbooks are rather fragmented, focusing on the contents of cultural representation from different perspectives, such as ideology, students, and teachers. For instance, Lillie Padilla and Rosti Vana^[1] presented a critical discourse analysis of underlying language ideologies derived from L2 Spanish textbooks. Csilla Wenninger and Tamas Kiss^[2] proposed a semiotic framework on the basis of two English language textbooks written by and for Hungarians. Ukrit Chimmarak, Denchai Prabjandee and Namfah Namfah^[3] investigated the manifestation of Global Englishes features in three English language textbooks commonly used in the lower secondary schools of eastern Thailand. Nguyen Quang Tien^[4] examined how interculturalism and multiculturalism are portrayed in a series of English language textbooks produced for high school students in Vietnam. Among these literatures, Hicham Astaifi and Yamina EI Kirat EI Allame^[5] investigated the representation of culture in three popular Moroccan EFL textbooks and its potential influence on the development of learners' intercultural awareness. The findings revealed varying degrees of cultural integration across the textbooks, with "window on the world" emphasizing English-speaking culture, "Ticket to English 1" showing a lack of cultural references, and "Ticket to English 2" adopting a more comprehensive approach by incorporating learners' native culture, English-speaking culture and broader international cultures. Astaifi and EI Allame concluded that the textbooks did not effectively integrate culture to enhance learners' intercultural awareness despite the variation in cultural representation. As a result, they recommended a systematic and balanced approach to cultural integration in Moroccan EFL textbooks, suggesting a gradual approach by introducing learners' native culture first, followed by English-speaking culture, and finally international cultures. Wu Xiaowei and Chen Xuyuan^[6] analyzed the representation of cultural contents in PEP senior high school English textbooks of China from the perspectives of cultural region, cultural structure, and cultural function. The research found that the textbooks portray the target language culture, native language culture and international culture in a relatively balanced way. The cultural contents in the textbooks are rich and diverse, covering clothing, food, music, history, geography, religion, art, etc. The cultural contents are presented in a variety of ways, including both explicit and implicit cultural introduction.

Many Chinese scholars have carried out discussions on the cultural contents in the English textbooks from the perspectives such as textbook compilation, evaluation, and functions. He Lifan^[7] analyzed the representation of Chinese cultural elements in the experimental textbooks (1st to 9th volumes of for the senior high school English curriculum) published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, and explored the ways to better integrate Chinese culture into English textbooks. Tang Shuang^[8] compared the cultural contents in the old and new editions of the PEP senior high school English textbooks and revealed the importance of textbook updates in cultural education. Cheng Xiaotang and Kang Yan^[9] discussed the cultural problems in the process of compiling English teaching materials for primary and secondary schools and proposed corresponding solutions. Guo Baoxian^[10] delved into the role of English language textbooks in preserving and advancing Chinese culture in the modern era and put forward strategies and approaches to accomplish this goal. Zhuang Zhixiang^[11] dedicated his research to constructing a foreign language textbook compilation and evaluation system with Chinese characteristics, laying the theoretical foundation for the incorporation of cultural elements into English textbooks.

These literatures have provided significant insights into cultural teaching in English education. However, there are some inadequacies. First, there is a lack of systematic analysis in the research, as it fails to utilize a structured framework to examine textbook contents from various dimensions. Some are from the perspective of cultural representation modes, some from that of types, and some from that of cultural dimensions. Second, there is an imbalance in emphasis between cultural representation content and representation modes. Insufficient scientific rigor is applied to the analysis of cultural representation modes, resulting in a lack of thorough and detailed examination. Third, researches are primarily centered on the cultural aspects of senior high school English language textbooks published by People's Education Press, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, and Beijing Normal University Press, paying relatively less attention to the cultural analysis of junior high school English textbooks.

3. Methodology

3.1 Analytical Framework

The “framework for analyzing cultural representation in Foreign Language Textbooks” proposed by Zhang Hong and Li Xiaonan (Hereinafter referred to as “the framework”) is the analytical framework of this study. Zhang Hong and Li Xiaonan^[12] utilized the classification framework proposed by Kachru & Nelson^[13] and Cortazzi & Jin^[14] and categorized the cultural contents of textbooks according to geographical locations, dividing it into the learners’ native culture, the target language country’s culture, other countries’ culture, and international culture. Additionally, they adopted Moran’s^[15] five dimensions of culture, i.e., cultural products, cultural practices, cultural perspectives, cultural communities, and cultural persons, as a reference for their “framework to analyze the representation of cultural contents in foreign language textbooks.” Then, they defined the representation modes of cultural contents as how cultural content is portrayed, and divided them into explicit and implicit modes. The explicit mode is the presentation of cultural contents in the language input materials, including reading materials, listening texts, and video scripts that are clearly themed around culture, as well as sections specifically dedicated to presenting cultural knowledge. The implicit mode refers to the presentation of culture in exercises. At last, they encode and calculate the weight of the Chinese culture contents in the textbooks from different educational stages, different editions, and different countries.

The study utilizes the concept of learners’ native culture from “the Framework”, i.e., the Chinese culture. “The Framework” classifies Chinese culture into traditional culture, revolutionary culture, and modern culture, while “the New Curriculum Standards” and the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China indicate that Chinese culture refers to fine traditional Chinese culture, revolutionary culture, and socialist advanced culture. Therefore, the study adopts the terminology used in the New Curriculum Standards.

3.2 Research Questions

Textbooks are not neutral instructional tools but are influenced by political, social and cultural ideologies. They often reflect the values, beliefs, and perspectives of the society. The study tries to find the answer to the following two questions: (1) What Chinese culture are presented in the junior high school English textbooks? (2) How is the Chinese culture portrayed in the junior high school English textbooks?

3.3 Research Subject

The English textbooks published by People’s Education Press (PEP) for junior high school students are chosen as the research subject. The PEP edition of English textbooks is widely used and very representative in the market. The set of textbooks includes a total of five volumes, covering from Grade 7 to Grade 9.

3.4 Research Method

Table 1: Analysis and Coding of the PEP English Textbook for Junior High School Students, Vol. 1

Cultural Content	Cultural types	Cultural dimensions	Sections	Pages	Representation modes	Weight	Frequency	Intensity
Extra-curricular activity	Socialist advanced culture	Cultural practice	Reading 2b	29	text	8	1	8
Ping-pong	Socialist advanced culture	Cultural practice	Reading 2c exercises	29	exercises	1	1	1
Holidays in China	Socialist advanced culture	Cultural practice	Self-check	48	exercises	1	4	4
Chinese	Fine traditional Chinese culture	Cultural practice	Listening 1a	49	exercises	1	1	1
Chinese	Fine traditional Chinese culture	Cultural practice	Grammar focus 3b	51	exercises	1	1	1
Chinese subject	Fine traditional Chinese culture	Cultural practice	Reading 2b	53	Text	10	1	10

First, study “the Framework”, understand it and know how to utilize it. Understand and get familiar with the two fundamental cultural types, cultural dimensions, as well as cultural representation modes. Clarify the open coding and weight assignment of the cultural representation modes in the teaching materials.

Second, analyze the PEP edition of English textbooks for junior high school students in China one by one. Identify the content related to Chinese culture on a chapter-by-chapter and page-by-page basis. Analyze, classify, encode, and calculate the weight of the Chinese culture items in the textbooks according to the “Framework”, and then conduct statistical analysis in Excel. (Table 1)

4. Major Findings

4.1 Cultural Types

According to both “the Framework” and “the New Curriculum Standards”, there are three types of Chinese culture, i.e., fine traditional Chinese culture, revolutionary culture, and socialist advanced culture.

The proportion of fine traditional Chinese culture in the PEP English textbooks for junior high school students is greater than that of socialist advanced culture, while the percentage of revolutionary culture in the textbooks is zero. The content of fine traditional Chinese culture, such as the Dragon Boat Festival, the Mid-Autumn Festival, tea art, the story of Yu Gong Moving Mountains and so on are illustrated in the textbooks. The achievements of socialist advanced culture, such as the weather, landscape, activities and development of the cities of Harbin, Nanjing, Shanghai, Hongkong, are also incorporated into the textbooks, demonstrating a modern, prosperous, beautiful, and harmonious China. The cultural type with the highest presentation intensity is fine traditional Chinese culture, accounting for 78.79% (338 points). It is followed by socialist advanced culture, accounting for 21.21% (91 points). The representation intensity of revolutionary culture in the textbooks is zero, as no content in relate to the revolutionary culture appears in all five volumes of the PEP edition of junior high school English textbooks. This is consistent with the result of previous researches that the representation of Chinese culture in English textbooks in China pays little attention to revolutionary culture^[16]. (Table 2)

Table 2: The Representation Intensity and Percentage of Different Types of Chinese Culture in the PEP English Textbooks for Junior High School Students

Types of Chinese Culture	Intensity (points)	Percentage
fine traditional Chinese culture	338	78.79%
revolutionary culture	0	0
socialist advanced culture	91	21.21%
Total	429	100%

4.2 Cultural Dimensions

“The Framework” adopted Moran’s five dimensions of culture: products (e.g. tools, food, clothes), practices (e.g. verbal and non-verbal language, actions and interactions, taboos), perspectives (values, beliefs), communities (race, gender, religion, etc.) and persons (individuals).

In the PEP English Textbooks for Junior High School Students, the intensity of the representation dimension of cultural practices is the highest, followed by that of the cultural products, then the cultural persons, and the cultural perspectives. The intensity of the dimension of cultural practices accounts for 54.55% (234 points), and that of the cultural products accounts for 33.80% (145 points). The dimensions of cultural persons and cultural perspectives are less involved, accounting for 11.18% (48 points) and 0.47% (2 points) respectively, with no dimension of cultural communities. In terms of cultural types, fine traditional Chinese culture and socialist advanced culture are primarily manifested through the dimension of cultural practices, such as traditional festival customs, table manners, tea ceremony, extracurricular activities, and Ping-pong sports. The dimension of cultural products, such as sky lanterns, Chinese chess, Gong Bao chicken, Mapo tofu, and terracotta warriors ranks second. The fine traditional Chinese culture does not present cultural perspectives but features cultural persons such as Hou Yi, Chang’e, and Abing. Socialist advanced culture does not feature cultural persons, but presents cultural concepts, such as harmonious coexistence between human and nature. The dimensions of Chinese culture portrayed in the textbooks are closely related to students’ lives, such as traditional Chinese festivals, etiquette, customs, and the campus life. (Table 3)

Table 3: The Representation Intensity and Percentage of Different Cultural Dimensions in the PEP English Textbooks for Junior High School Students

Dimensions	Types		Intensity (Points)	Percentage
	Fine traditional Chinese culture	Socialist advanced culture		
Cultural products	119	26	145	33.80%
Cultural practices	171	63	234	54.55%
Cultural perspectives	0	2	2	0.47%
Cultural communities	0	0	0	0%
Cultural persons	48	0	48	11.18%
Total	338	91	429	100%

4.3 Cultural Representation Modes

“The Framework” divides the cultural representation modes into that of explicit and implicit. The explicit mode is related to input language materials, including texts, pictures, background information and standalone cultural sections. The implicit mode is related to exercises, including texts, pictures, understanding, and exercises.

The intensity of the representation mode of cultural texts in the PEP English textbooks for junior high school students ranks the highest with a score of 207 points, representing approximately 48.25% of the total. Following closely is that of the mode of exercises with 68 points and the mode of understanding with 62 points, comprising around 15.85% and 14.45% respectively. The intensity of the mode of exercise pictures is 47 points, accounting for approximately 10.95%, while the intensity of exercise texts is 37 points, representing about 8.62%. The intensity of mode of the cultural sections holds a strength of 6 points, making up about 1.41%, notably less than other representation modes. The intensity of the mode of the background information carries a strength of 2 points, accounting for 0.47%. The distribution of the intensity on various modes of cultural representation reveals that a significant emphasis is put on cultural content and practical application through exercises, with supplementary visual aids, while less emphasis is dedicated to standalone cultural sections and background information. (Table 4)

Table 4: The Intensity and Percentage of Different Cultural Representation Modes in the PEP English Textbooks for Junior High School Students

Representation Modes	Cultural Types		Intensity (points)	Percentage	
	Fine traditional Chinese culture	Socialist advanced culture			
Texts	154	53	207	48.25%	
Cultural sections	6	0	6	1.41%	
Pictures	0	0	0	0.00%	
Background Information	0	2	2	0.47%	
Activities and Exercises	Texts	27	10	37	8.62%
	Pictures	43	4	47	10.95%
Exercises	Understanding	62	0	62	14.45%
	Exercises	46	22	68	15.85%
Total	338	91	429	100%	

The intensities of the cultural representation modes of both the fine traditional Chinese culture and the socialist advanced culture are uneven. Notably, the mode of cultural texts exhibits the highest intensity, followed by language activities and exercises, while standalone cultural section and background information section demonstrate comparatively lower intensities. This uneven distribution highlights distinct educational priorities within the curriculum. The notable emphasis on textual materials indicates a strong focus on literary expressions. The prevalence of language activities suggests an intentional integration of language proficiency with cultural comprehension. However, the lower intensities observed in standalone cultural sections and background information raise concerns about the comprehensiveness of cultural exploration and contextual understanding. This nuanced distribution suggests that while the curriculum prioritizes language skills and textual analysis, there may be a risk of neglecting broader cultural appreciation.

5. Suggestions for the Compilation of PEP Junior High School English Textbooks

5.1 Increase the Representation of the Content of Revolutionary Culture

The percentage of the content of Chinese revolutionary culture in the PEP English textbooks for junior high school students is zero. Chinese revolutionary culture is deeply intertwined with pivotal moments in China's modern history, such as the Chinese Revolution and the establishment of the People's Republic of China. It reflects the struggles, aspirations, and sacrifices of the Chinese people during periods of radical social and political transformation, leaving a lasting imprint on the nation's historical narrative. What's more, revolutionary culture has played a crucial role in shaping Chinese national identity. It has contributed to the construction of narratives that emphasize the resilience, unity, and revolutionary spirit of the Chinese people, fostering a sense of collective memory and shared historical consciousness. The symbols, heroes, and rhetoric of revolutionary culture continue to influence notions of patriotism and national pride in contemporary China. Incorporating the representation of the revolutionary culture into English textbooks helps students understand the historical context, events, and ideologies that shaped modern China, promotes their cultural awareness, and promotes their sociopolitical awareness while facilitating language acquisition. By engaging with these themes, students develop a deeper appreciation for the complexities of history and society, preparing them to navigate an increasingly interconnected and diverse world.

5.2 Enhance the Representation of the Dimensions of Chinese Cultural Persons and Perspectives

The involvement of Chinese cultural persons and perspectives in the textbooks is rather low. Chinese cultural persons are the individuals who have made significant contributions to Chinese culture, either historically or in modern times. These persons are from various fields such as literature, art, philosophy, science, and politics, and their works and ideas have had a lasting impact on Chinese society and beyond. For instance, Confucius, Lao Tzu, Sun Tzu, Li Bai, Du Fu, Wang Xizhi, Zheng He, Lu Xun, Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, ...these are a small sample of the diverse range of cultural persons. Cultural perspectives encompass a wide range of elements such as values, beliefs, and attitudes. Chinese cultural perspectives are deeply rooted in the country's rich history, philosophical traditions, social norms, and values. Confucianism, for instance, is a typical Chinese cultural perspective. Concepts such as filial piety (respect for elders and ancestors), social harmony, righteousness, and the importance of education are central to Confucian thought. These principles shape Chinese attitude towards family, society, and governance. Other key aspects of Chinese cultural perspectives include collectivism, harmony with nature, cultural relativism, and so on.

These persons and these perspectives, rich in history, tradition and unique insights, deserve to be widely represented and deeply appreciated across the globe. Their voices, stories, and contributions form an integral part of the diverse cultural tapestry that makes up our world, and it is crucial that they are given due recognition and respect on the international stage. By sharing their experiences and viewpoints, not only is global cultural understanding enriched, but also mutual respect and harmony among nations are promoted.

In the meanwhile, these persons and these perspectives help to deepen students' understanding of Chinese identity and develop their profound sense of pride and belonging. They come to see themselves as heirs to a rich and vibrant cultural legacy, imbued with wisdom and traditions of their ancestors. This sense of cultural pride fosters a strong sense of belonging and unity among students, regardless of their geographic location or background, creating a shared sense of identity that transcends boundaries.

5.3 Balance the Representation Modes

The representation mode of cultural texts in the textbooks is predominant. Lower intensities are observed in standalone cultural sections and background information. And the intensity of the mode of pictures is zero. These may result in (1) limiting the depth of cultural exploration and understanding for students who are interested in learning more about specific cultural topics since the resources are limited and can't address their interests adequately. (2) making it challenging for students to fully comprehend the cultural context and significance of the presented material. Cultural products and practices often carry implicit meanings and references that are not immediately apparent to outsiders. Without background information that provides the necessary context, students may misinterpret or miss entirely the deeper cultural significance of what they are studying. (3) reducing students' engagement with the textbooks. Pictures often serve as visual aids to capture students' attention and make the content more engaging,

especially for junior high school students. Without pictures, they may find the textbooks less interesting, leading to a decrease in their engagement with the cultural material. Therefore, a balance among different representation modes such as exercises, exercise pictures, exercise texts, cultural sections, and background information needs to be ensured.

Maintaining a balance among different representation modes in the textbooks contributes to the enhanced comprehension, holistic development, improved retention, and inclusive learning environment. A balanced approach incorporates diverse learning styles, catering to visual, auditory and kinesthetic learners. This ensures that students with different learning preferences can all benefit and comprehend the cultural materials more effectively. Then, by including cultural sections and background information, students gain a broader perspective on the subject matter. This promotes a more holistic understanding of the topic, encouraging students to make connections between different areas of knowledge. What's more, using multiple representation modes can aid in memory retention. When information is presented in different formats, it creates multiple pathways for recall, enhancing students' ability to retain and recall information. Last, but not the least, a balanced approach ensures that students with different abilities and learning needs are accommodated. For example, students with visual impairments may benefit from exercise texts and audio descriptions, while students who learn better visually can benefit from exercise pictures.

6. Conclusion

The paper, while providing a valuable insight into the cultural representations in the junior high school textbooks published by the People's Education Press in China, possesses certain limitations that deserve further exploration. Firstly, the exclusive focus on a single publisher and educational level restricts the generalizability of the findings. To truly comprehend the complexity and diversity of cultural representations in text books, a broader scope of analysis is necessary. This would involve studying textbooks from different publishers, targeting various educational levels, such as elementary, high school, and even university-level textbooks.

Secondly, the paper offers a snapshot of the cultural representations in the text books at a specific point in time. However, textbooks and their cultural contents are not static, they evolve and adapt to reflect changes in society, education policies and cultural norms. The lack of longitudinal analysis leaves a gap in understanding how these representations have changed over time. Future research should aim to track these changes and updates, comparing older and newer editions of the same textbook to identify trends and shifts in cultural content.

Moreover, the paper's findings are limited to a quantitative analysis of the frequency and types of cultural representations. Qualitative analysis such as in-depth interviews with textbook authors, reviewers, and educators, could provide valuable insights into the motivations, perspectives, and challenges involved in representing diverse cultures in textbooks.

In conclusion, while the paper serves as the starting point for understanding cultural representations in Chinese junior high school textbooks, there is much room for future research to expand the scope, depths, and temporal perspective of this analysis. By studying textbooks from different publishers and educational levels, tracking changes over time, and incorporating qualitative methods, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of how textbooks shape and reflect cultural representations, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and equitable education system.

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