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Cultural Representation in the Cultural Focus Sections of a Chinese Senior High English Textbook Series

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Abstract: *This study analyzes cultural representation in the compulsory part volumes (1–3) of the new version of senior high school English textbooks by Shanghai Educational Publishing House. Using Kachru [1], Cortazzi & Jin [2], Moran [3], and Zhang et al's [4] FARCET framework, content analysis reveals three findings: (1) target and area-non-specific cultures dominate, followed by Chinese culture, while international culture receives least attention; (2) cultural products are most represented, cultural persons and perspectives least; (3) background cultural information is the most frequent form. The findings inform textbook revision.*

Keywords: *Senior high school English textbooks, cultural representation, cultural focus section, content analysis, Shanghai Educational Publishing House*

1. Introduction

Globalization has intensified cross-border exchanges across political, economic, cultural, and technological domains. English, as a lingua franca, is used not only by native speakers but also by speakers from diverse lingua-cultural backgrounds for communicating, negotiating, problem-solving, and decision-making in a variety of situations. It has become a crucial bridge for cross-cultural communication worldwide. The National English Curriculum Standards for General Senior High School (NECS, 2017 edition, 2025 revised edition) is designed to comprehensively cultivate students' core competencies in the subject, namely language ability, cultural awareness, thinking capacity, and learning ability. Through learning and using English, students are guided to understand and draw on the cultural essence and achievements of civilizations from various countries, deepen their understanding of and identification with Chinese culture, nurture a deep-rooted sense of national identity, strengthen cultural confidence, broaden international perspectives, and enhance their awareness and capacity for cross-cultural communication. Ultimately, the curriculum aims to equip students with the ability to tell China's stories well and disseminate Chinese culture effectively.

Textbooks function as both curriculum products and cultural products with cultural information permeating language materials. Beyond providing knowledge and teaching methods, textbooks shape value orientations in talent cultivation. In China's educational system, English textbooks facilitate language learning, help students understand both target cultures and global cultural diversity, and enable them to express their native culture in English. Senior high school English textbooks are the primary carriers of knowledge, significantly influencing students' cultural knowledge acquisition. They should value cultural diversity, present multicultural content, and address cultural awareness from multiple perspectives. To achieve national educational goals, textbooks need to integrate excellent Chinese culture, advanced target-language culture, and diverse world cultures. The importance of cultural representation lies in the scientific and appropriate selection and presentation of cultural content. Understanding cultural representation in senior high school English textbooks is therefore essential.

According to the NECS (2017 edition), cultural awareness refers to the understanding of Chinese and foreign cultures as well as the recognition of excellent cultures, which means that English courses are critical to enhancing students' cultural awareness as well as their cross-cultural communication skills. This study's theoretical framework is based on the core concepts presented by these scholars, while incorporating the recently developed Framework for Analyzing the Representation of Cultures in English

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Textbooks (hereinafter referred to as FARCET) by et al in 2022. It aims to examine the cultural representation in the cultural focus sections found in the compulsory part (volumes 1–3) of the new version of senior high school English textbooks published by the Shanghai Educational Publishing House in 2020 (hereinafter referred to as cultural focus sections of the book (2020))20. The study seeks to outline the distribution of cultural regions and cultural categories within these sections and to explore the specific characteristics of cultural representation incorporated in them. In addition to providing teachers with comprehensive insights into the cultural content of the cultural focus sections, this study also offers reference suggestions for the revision and adaptation of the textbook.

2. Literature Review

Culture is a complex and multifaceted concept that can be understood and interpreted differently across perspectives. Halverson [5] distinguishes "big C" culture—referring to notable achievements in history, art, architecture, music, and literature—from "small c" culture, which denotes everyday customs and practices. Other scholars conceptualize culture as communication or as a general construct detached from specific cultural contexts. Chinese scholars often define culture either in broad terms, encompassing all material and spiritual products, or in narrow terms, referring only to spiritual products such as language, literature, art, and ideologies. The National English Curriculum Standards for General Senior High School (2017 edition, hereafter NECS 2017) defines culture as including both material aspects (e.g., food, clothing, architecture, transportation, and inventions) and spiritual aspects (e.g., art, literature, philosophy, history, education, and science). Drawing on these perspectives, the present study defines culture as comprising material and spiritual elements in line with NECS 2017, together with behavioral customs associated with daily life and the individuals or groups who represent the culture of a given country or region.

Cultural representation has been a central concern in language textbook research. Recent years have witnessed growing scholarly attention to this topic. Research in this area can be broadly divided into theoretical and empirical strands. Theoretically, scholars have developed analytical frameworks for cultural representation along three main dimensions: categories of countries or regions, cultural categories, and the integration of the two. With regard to country/region categories, Cortazzi and Jin [2] proposed the tripartite classification of source culture, target culture, and international culture. Rashidi and Meihami [6] subsequently added the concept of culture-neutral content. Drawing on Kachru's [1] three concentric circles, Shin et al. [7] further classified cultures into inner circle, outer circle, expanding circle, and other cultures. Concerning cultural categories, Byram [8] put forward eight categories, including social identity, social interaction, beliefs, institutions, social life, history, geography, stereotypes, and national identity. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) framed culture in terms of products, practices, and perspectives. Moran [3] later expanded this into five dimensions: cultural products, cultural practices, cultural perspectives, cultural persons, and cultural communities. Recent theoretical developments have also begun to incorporate perspectives from cultural ecology and the ideological dimensions of textbook content.

Empirically, a growing body of research has examined cultural representation in textbooks across different educational contexts. Keles and Yazan [9] found that New Headway Elementary predominantly focused on Western, European, and Anglo-American cultures, with limited coverage of non-European cultures. Vuong, Trakulkasemsuk, and Zahabi [10] analyzed the Grade 11 textbook in Vietnam's "Global Success" series and found a strong emphasis on "modernized culture," demonstrating an association between English learning and international values, though at the cost of balanced cultural representation.

Alongside cultural representation research, studies focusing on specific sections within senior high school English textbooks offer further relevant insights. Chinese scholars have conducted extensive research on textbook sections, with a noticeable increase since 2006, whereas international researchers have tended to concentrate more on overall section design than on individual sections. In terms of research focus, some studies have compared the overall design of textbook sections. The existing literature indicates a gradually maturing research system for cultural representation studies and a broad foundation of research on textbook sections. However, two notable gaps remain: first, there is insufficient research on newly compiled textbooks; second, few studies have specifically examined textbook sections intentionally designed to develop cultural knowledge. Although recent studies have advanced our understanding of cultural representation in Chinese EFL textbooks through multimodal and diachronic approaches, none has systematically investigated the dedicated "cultural focus sections"—a distinctive pedagogical feature in certain newly compiled textbook series that concentrates cultural content into specialized units. Most prior work has addressed overall cultural representation rather than dedicated

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cultural content sections. To address these gaps, the present study investigates the cultural focus sections of the 2020 edition (Volumes 1–3) of the senior high school English textbook series published by Shanghai Educational Publishing House, examining both the content and the forms of cultural representation.

3. Theoretical Foundation

This chapter establishes the analytical framework employed in the present study for examining cultural representation in the cultural focus sections. The framework integrates two dimensions: the content of cultural representation and the forms of cultural representation. For the content dimension, it draws on Cortazzi and Jin's [2] classification of cultural regions and Moran's [3] five categories of culture. For the forms dimension, it adapts the framework proposed by Zhang et al [4], with modifications justified by the specific nature of the research object. The integrated framework is summarized in Figure 2 and elaborated in the following sections.

The global spread of English has diversified its sociolinguistic functions. Kachru's [1] three concentric circles model (Figure 1) conceptualizes this diversity by grouping English varieties into the Inner Circle (e.g., the USA, UK), Outer Circle (e.g., India, Nigeria), and Expanding Circle (e.g., China, Russia, Brazil). This model underscores the pluricentric nature of English and provides a macro-level mapping of English use worldwide.

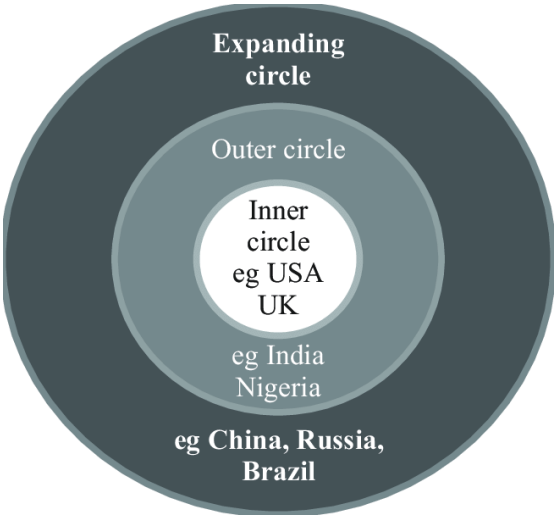


Figure 1: Kachru's [1] three concentric circles model.

Building on Kachru's work, Cortazzi and Jin [2] proposed a tripartite classification specifically tailored to cultural content in English textbooks. They distinguish three cultural regions: source culture, target culture, and international culture. Table 1 presents this classification, which the present study adopts as the framework for categorizing cultural regions in the analysis.

Table 1: Cortazzi & Jin's [2] cultural region classification.

Dimensions	Explanation
Source Culture	It refers to the native culture of the learner.
Target Culture	It refers to the culture of an English-speaking country (where English is used as the mother tongue), such as British and American culture, and so on.
International Culture	It refers to English being learned as a second or foreign language. Learners can perceive different benefits from learning about different cultures.

To categorize the types of cultural content, the present study adopts Moran's [3] framework, which conceptualizes culture as comprising five interrelated dimensions: cultural products, cultural practices, cultural perspectives, cultural communities, and cultural persons. Table 2 provides the operational definitions and examples used in this study.

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Table 2: The content of cultural representation in this study.

Cultural categories	
Dimensions	Explanation
Cultural products are all artifacts produced	
or adopted by the members of the culture,	artifacts (food,language,money,etc.) places (buildings,cities,etc.) institutions(family,politics,etc.) art forms(music,clothes,dancing,painting,etc.)
which ae classified into four code systems	
that measure cultural dimensions in four broad aspects.	
Cultural practices comprise the full range of actions and interactions that members of the culture carry out.	operations(manipulation of cultural products) acts(ritualized communicative practices) scenarios(extended communicative practices) lives(stories of members of the culture)
Cultural perspectives refer to the shared worldviews within a cultural group that guide its members cultural practices.	They represent a combination of perceptions, beliefs,values,and attitudes that underlie the products and guide individuals and communities in the practices of the culture.Such as Confucianism,mottos,proverbs,and so on.
Cultural communities refer to specific groups of individuals who engage in practices in specific social and physical settings.	Broad,amorphous communities like national culture(Chinese culture,American culture,etc.), gender,race,and so on Narrowly defined groupings like a social club,a charity organization,and so on
Cultural persons refer to the individuals who uniquely embody their culture and community.	They refer to famous individuals who represent particular cultures and communities. (Hua Luogeng,Albert Einstein,etc.).

The forms through which cultural content is presented are equally important. Zhang et al identified five typical forms in English textbooks: (1) cultural texts, (2) cultural knowledge sections, (3) pictures and quotations, (4) background cultural information, and (5) exercises. Since the cultural focus sections themselves constitute a dedicated "cultural knowledge section," this category is excluded from the forms analysis to avoid redundancy. Consequently, the present study examines four forms of cultural representation, as defined in Table 3.

Table 3The forms of cultural representation in this study.

Dimensions	Explanation
Cultural texts	They refer to texts with the theme of one or more different cultural contents in input materials and exercises.There are three types:reading texts,video transcripts,and listening texts.
Pictures and quotations	They refer to the pictures and quotations used to provide cultural content in the input materials and exercises.
Background cultural information	It refers to cultural items that serve as background information in the input materials.Such information may encompass the names of individuals,locations,and other pertinent details.
Exercises	They are classified into three types:cultural understanding exercises,cultural expression exercises,and language learning exercises that incorporate cultural items.

To sum up, Figure 2 provides a summary of the analytical framework of cultural representation in this study, while a more comprehensive analysis of the framework elements is available in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

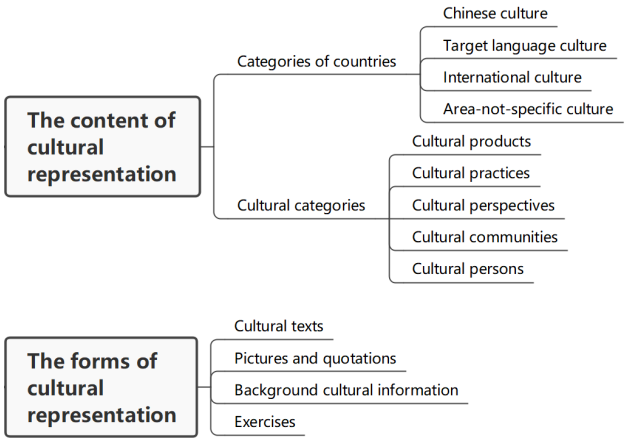


Figure 2 The analytic framework of cultural representation in this study.

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4. Research Methodology

This chapter delineates the research questions, research materials, and research procedures employed in the study.

4.1 Research Questions

This study centers on the cultural focus sections found in the compulsory part (volumes 1-3) of the new version of senior high school English textbooks by Shanghai Educational Publishing House. It aims to address the following questions:

1) Which regions or countries' cultures are represented in the cultural focus sections of the book (2020)?

2) What cultural categories are represented in the cultural focus sections of the book (2020)?

3) What are the forms of cultural representation in the cultural focus sections of the book (2020)?

4.2 Research Materials

The research specifically targets the cultural content of the cultural focus sections in the senior high school English textbook series published by Shanghai Educational Publishing House (2020 edition, hereinafter referred to as "the textbook"). The textbook is based on the National English Curriculum Standards for General Senior High School (2017 edition, 2020 revised edition). The set comprises seven volumes: compulsory Books 1–3 and selective compulsory Books 1–4. Each volume consists of four units, and each unit is further divided into five sections: reading and interaction, grammar activity, listening and speaking, writing, and cultural focus.

The cultural focus sections of the book (2020) offer a wide range of exemplary Chinese cultures and cultures from other countries. They serve as a focal point for cultural content in the new version of senior high school English textbooks by Shanghai Educational Publishing House, providing students with an opportunity to explore diverse cultural phenomena and characteristics. Consequently, studying the sections can indirectly reflect the state of cultural representation in the new version of senior high school English textbooks by Shanghai Educational Publishing House. The cultural focus section of each unit contains a reading and a video, and there are also some exercises related to them. For the sake of understanding and analysis, there is a brief summary of the themes of the 12 units along with the content of their corresponding cultural focus sections in compulsory textbooks 1-3 (the three books are respectively numbered T1, T2, and T3). The information is summarized in Table 4.

Table 4 Brief content of each unit of the cultural focus sections of the book (2020).

Textbooks	Unit	Themes of the unit	Content of the cultural focus sections
T1	Unit one	Our world	This section offers information about the different cultures of the world through pictures and presents some historical facts about Irish immigrants in the USA.
T1	Unit two	Places	This section tells stories behind different place names and introduces Nanning-a city in southern China.
T1	Unit three	Choices	This section looks at the pros and cons of online food ordering and delivery services and gives us a glimpse into the variety of food choices on the Cowley Road in Oxford.
T1	Unit four	My space	This section presents a brochure about a historic house—Highclere Castle in the UK. Finally, the video explores how the pastimes in a British family have changed over the past four decades.
T2	Unit one	No limits	This section gives an account of Captain Scott's expedition to the South Pole and introduces extreme sports in Queenstown, New Zealand.
T2	Unit two	Roads to education	This section presents a poem about a teacher who inspired and influenced his students and shows student life at an American high school.
T2	Unit three	Progress?	This section introduces the history of the English language and discusses the use of English in South Africa and Wales.
T2	Unit four	Achievements	This section presents the stories of three people who started out

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Textbooks	Unit	Themes of the unit	Content of the cultural focus sections
			as failures but later became successful, and demonstrates how three teenagers pursue their dreams in the field of table tennis.
T3	Unit one	The media	This section offers information about Chinese foods and their culture shown in the famous documentary series A Bite of China, and introduces how films are made in the English film and television studio named Pinewood Studios in London.
T3	Unit two	The things around us	This section introduces the BDS, the Chinese Bei Dou Navigation Satellite System, and shows paper-making at a paper mill in the north of England in the UK.
T3	Unit three	The way we are	This section introduces the Miao's costumes and their related culture and history, and presents an interesting story about two entrepreneurs who create a fashion business out of junk clothes in London.
T3	Unit four	Travellers' tales	This section presents a short history of American Route 66.

4.3 Research Procedures

4.3.1 Extracting Cultural Items and Coding

To ensure the reliability of the coding process, this study adopted a collaborative coding and consensus-building procedure. Prior to formal coding, the author and two peer researchers with relevant expertise in textbook analysis thoroughly discussed the analytical framework presented in Chapter 3, clarifying the operational definitions of each coding category. The three coders then independently pilot-coded a sample of cultural items from the cultural focus sections. Discrepancies were discussed immediately and resolved through iterative negotiation. In cases where the three coders failed to reach agreement, the supervisor was consulted until full consensus was achieved. This procedure served to establish inter-coder reliability and enhance the validity of the subsequent analysis.

In this study, cultural items are selected from sentences, paragraphs, and even the entire text, serving as coding units. When a paragraph or text contains multiple items, they are segmented and processed accordingly to ensure accurate analysis. Subsequently, the author systematically searched and identified the cultural items presented in the cultural focus sections of the book (2020). Finally, the author coded the cultural items in Excel based on the analytical framework of this study. An example of the coding can be found in Table 5.

Table 5 Coding examples in this study.

Item	Categories of countries	Countries	Cultural categories	The forms of cultural representation	Frequency
Chinese knots	Chinese culture (fine traditional culture)	China	Cultural products	background cultural information	1
the Geography Lesson	Target language culture	UK	Cultural products	Cultural texts	1
Thai food	International culture	Thailand	Cultural products	background cultural information	1
the Internet	Area-not-specific culture	——	Cultural products	Background cultural information	1

4.3.2 Counting Frequencies and Calculating the Proportion

It is essential to calculate the frequency of the cultural items in this study. In the present study, frequency did not refer to the frequency of appearance of the items of a certain cultural content but rather the frequency of the representation of the content [4]. For example, Route 66, which was fully introduced throughout one reading, was counted as one occurrence, regardless of how many times Route 66 is mentioned in the text. In Unit four of T1, Highclere Castle is presented in both text and picture formats. As a result, it will be counted twice in terms of frequency for this study.

In this study, the author quantified and analyzed the cultural items and used Excel sheets for filtering, summing, and other operations in order to come up with statistics on the percentage of categories of countries, cultural categories, and forms of cultural representation. These statistical results provide quantitative data support for the study and reveal the presentation of cultural content in cultural focus

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sections of the book (2020).

5. Results and Discussion

This chapter systematically analyzes cultural representation in the cultural focus sections of the 2020 textbook (volumes 1–3). The analytical framework considers two primary dimensions: content of cultural representation (categories of countries and cultural categories) and forms of cultural representation. The findings are substantiated with illustrative cases and quantitative analysis.

5.1 Categories of Countries

Drawing on Cortazzi and Jin [2] and Kachru [1], this study classifies the cultural content into four dimensions: Chinese culture, target language culture, international culture, and area-not-specific culture. The overall distribution reveals a marked imbalance: target language culture dominates with 310 occurrences (approximately 40%), followed by area-not-specific culture (240 occurrences, ~31%), Chinese culture (152 occurrences, ~19%), and international culture (80 occurrences, ~10%).

5.1.1 Chinese Culture

Chinese culture ranks third in frequency (152 occurrences, ~19%). Target language culture is highest (310, ~40%), more than twice that of Chinese culture, indicating an imbalance.

Chinese culture is further classified into fine traditional culture, revolutionary culture, and advanced socialist culture. Fine traditional culture appears most frequently (106 times), covering topics such as traditional cuisine and festivals. For example, A Bite of China introduces Ningbo rice cakes and dumplings, linking food to family reunion. The Miao people's traditional clothing is also discussed. These examples suggest a deliberate effort to showcase China's tangible and intangible cultural heritage, aligning with the curriculum's emphasis on transmitting fine traditional Chinese culture. Advanced socialist culture appears 45 times, including modern lifestyles (e.g., online food delivery in T1 Unit 3) and technological achievements (e.g., BeiDou Navigation Satellite System in T3 Unit 2, and other space achievements). Revolutionary culture appears only once (1978 reform and opening-up), consistent with Zhang et al. The marginal presence of revolutionary content thus represents a notable gap that future textbook revisions may need to address to achieve a genuinely balanced representation of the three cultural strands mandated by the national curriculum.

5.1.2 Target Language Culture

Target language culture refers to English-native countries (UK, US, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Ireland). It occurs 310 times (~40%). US (126) and UK (129) dominate, while Canadian culture appears only twice. Australian, New Zealand, and Irish cultures receive limited attention. Examples include Route 66 (US), Highclere Castle (UK), and brief mentions of Irish immigration, Australian place names, and Queenstown (New Zealand).

5.1.3 International Culture

International culture (non-inner circle and non-Chinese) occurs 80 times (~10%). It includes 11 European countries (e.g., Germany, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Italy), 6 Asian countries (e.g., India, Japan, Thailand, Bangladesh), and a few African countries (South Africa, Nigeria). Ancient Greek and Egyptian cultures are also mentioned. The most frequent are South Africa, Denmark, Germany, Greece, France, the Netherlands, and India, often discussed in contexts such as the history of English (T2 Unit 3) or Van Gogh (T2 Unit 4). This distribution reveals a Eurocentric bias within international culture, with European nations receiving substantially more coverage than those from Asia or Africa. Vuong, Trakulkasemsuk, and Zahabi [10] similarly noted that an emphasis on "modernized" international values may come at the cost of balanced cultural representation.

5.1.4 Area-not-specific Culture

Area-not-specific culture (shared human topics such as communication technology, papermaking, food delivery, entertainment) appears 240 times (~31%). Examples include paper production (T3 Unit 2) and food delivery apps (T1 Unit 3). While it promotes global citizenship awareness, some content may lack explicit cultural significance. The high frequency of culturally non-specific items raises questions about whether these instances genuinely contribute to learners' intercultural development or simply fill curricular space that could be devoted to culturally meaningful content.

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5.2 Cultural Categories

Adopting Moran's [3] five-dimensional classification, this section examines the distribution of cultural products, practices, perspectives, communities, and persons. The results reveal a pronounced hierarchy: cultural products dominate (562 occurrences, ~72%), followed by cultural practices (100, ~13%), cultural communities (62, ~8%), cultural persons (32, ~4%), and cultural perspectives (26, ~3%).

5.2.1 Cultural Products

Cultural products are the most frequent (562 occurrences, ~72% of total cultural categories). Target language culture contributes the most (244), followed by area-not-specific (154) and Chinese culture (104). Products include festivals, cuisine, technology, historical architecture, and fashion. Examples: Chinese knots, lanterns, guzheng (T1 Unit 1); British and Chinese cuisines (T1 Unit 3 video, T3 Unit 1 reading); and Junky Styling boutique (T3 Unit 3 video) promoting recycled clothing. These products are concrete and age-appropriate.

5.2.2 Cultural Practices

Cultural practices occur 100 times (~13%). Area-not-specific culture leads (63), then target language and Chinese cultures. Examples include South Pole expeditions (Scott and Amundsen, T2 Unit 1), Pinewood Studios film production, and a paper mill. These practices illustrate human spirit, environmental awareness, and industrial processes, helping students connect with real-world applications.

5.2.3 Cultural Perspectives

Cultural perspectives appear only 26 times (~3%), the least frequent. This aligns with previous studies. Chinese culture places relatively more emphasis on perspectives. Examples: Miao people's belief that silver brings good fortune and longevity (T3 Unit 3); the Spring Festival as family reunion and hope; respect for the elderly in Chinese culture (T1 Unit 1); and American high school students' sense of community and patriotism (T2 Unit 2). Despite low frequency, these perspectives offer deep cultural insights.

5.2.4 Cultural Communities

Cultural communities appear 62 times (~8%). Chinese culture and target language culture receive greater attention. Examples include Miao, Zhuang, Inuit, Anglo-Saxons, as well as modern groups like food delivery couriers, American high school students, and table tennis players. T2 Unit 2 video on American high school life provides comparative educational insights. This diversity broadens students' understanding of social dynamics.

5.2.5 Cultural Persons

Cultural persons occur 32 times (~4%). Target language culture dominates (24). Featured individuals include poets (Shakespeare, Brian Patten), scientists (Einstein, Hua Luogeng, Lord Carnarvon), artists (Van Gogh), and athletes (Ariel, Frank Raharinosy, Lily). T2 Unit 4 reading on Einstein, Van Gogh, and Hua Luogeng highlights resilience and perseverance. While individuals cannot fully represent a nation's culture, they illustrate human achievement and cultural heritage.

5.3 Forms of Cultural Representation

Following the framework developed by Zhang et al [4], this section analyzes the forms through which cultural content is presented: cultural texts, background cultural information, pictures and quotations, and exercises. The distribution is markedly uneven: background cultural information is the most frequent form (377 occurrences, ~48%), followed by exercises (307, ~40%), pictures and quotations (73, ~9%), and cultural texts (23, ~3%).

5.3.1 Cultural Texts and Background Cultural Information

Background cultural information is most frequent (377, ~48%), while cultural texts are rare (23, ~3%). Background information provides context for understanding cultural themes. Cultural texts, though few, are carefully chosen to connect with students' lives. Examples: food delivery services (T1 Unit 3) and success stories of Einstein, Van Gogh, Hua Luogeng. Chinese cultural texts, though limited, are rich: A Bite of China (Chinese snacks and festivals) and Miao traditional clothing. They effectively promote cultural awareness.

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5.3.2 Pictures and Quotations

Pictures (32, ~4%) and quotations (41, ~5%) appear infrequently. Pictures align with textual themes, e.g., a Miao girl in traditional attire, enhancing comprehension. Quotations appear at unit beginnings as preambles, orienting students to cultural themes. Their role, though limited, is pedagogically valuable.

5.3.3 Exercises

Exercises occur 307 times (~40%). They are divided into cultural expression exercises, cultural understanding exercises, and language exercises with cultural items. Cultural expression and understanding exercises dominate. For example, after a reading on food delivery, students express preferences and discuss environmental sustainability. These exercises develop critical thinking, cultural awareness, and social responsibility. Language exercises with cultural items are less frequent but still important for applying language in cultural contexts.

Overall, the multimodal approach adopted in the cultural focus sections—combining texts, images, quotations, and exercises—creates a dynamic learning environment. However, the heavy reliance on background cultural information at the expense of dedicated cultural texts, and the limited use of visual and epigraphic elements, suggests that the forms of cultural representation could be further diversified to enhance pedagogical effectiveness.

6. Conclusion

In summary, this study yields three major findings regarding the cultural focus sections of the 2020 edition (volumes 1–3). First, while these sections include target language culture, area-not-specific culture, Chinese culture, and international culture, the distribution is imbalanced. Target language culture dominates, with Chinese culture receiving relatively limited attention, especially revolutionary culture. Target language culture itself focuses heavily on Anglo-American cultures, neglecting other English-native countries. Area-not-specific culture ranks second and covers diverse topics aimed at fostering global citizenship, but international culture—particularly African cultures—is underrepresented. This imbalance restricts students' cross-cultural perspectives and weakens the cultivation of cultural confidence and identity. Second, among cultural categories, cultural products are most emphasized, followed by cultural practices and communities, whereas cultural persons and cultural perspectives appear much less frequently. Such an imbalance between surface and deep culture may reinforce stereotypes. Third, in terms of forms of cultural representation, background cultural information and exercises are the most common, while quotations, pictures, and cultural texts are less frequent. Despite their low frequency, cultural texts play a vital role in providing contextualized cultural learning.

The study extends textbook research by applying the FARCET framework to a dedicated cultural section in newly compiled Chinese EFL textbooks, thereby illuminating how curricular policy is enacted at the sectional level and highlighting the persistent gap between surface and deep culture in pedagogical design. Practically, textbook editors are advised to diversify target and international cultures, strengthen Chinese revolutionary culture, and increase the representation of cultural perspectives and persons through more focused cultural texts. Teachers should move beyond the textbook by supplementing deep-culture materials and fully exploiting cultural expression exercises to foster learners' critical thinking and cultural confidence.

Several limitations warrant caution. Only three compulsory volumes were analyzed, limiting generalizability; the study relied exclusively on internal evaluation without input from textbook users. Methodologically, inter-coder reliability was established through consensus negotiation rather than a robust statistical metric such as Cohen's Kappa, which may weaken the replicability of the findings. Future research should adopt such quantitative reliability measures, examine all seven volumes, and integrate external evaluations from teachers and students to yield a more comprehensive understanding.

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