

Representation of Chinese Culture in China's College English Textbooks—Case Study of *New Progressive College English Integrated Coursebook*

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Abstract: Against the national initiative of cultural confidence building in China, college English textbooks function as dual pedagogical carriers for linguistic competence cultivation and cross-cultural communication practice. Adopting a mixed-methods research design, this study takes Byram's cultural dimension theory, Shin's cultural classification model and China's official intercultural competence framework as theoretical underpinnings, to explore the embodied forms, distribution features and teaching effectiveness of Chinese cultural elements in *New Progressive College English Integrated Coursebook*. Drawing on textual content analysis, questionnaire data collected from 102 non-English major freshmen, and semi-structured interview materials from 5 frontline college English instructors, this research conducts systematic quantitative coding and qualitative interpretation. The findings indicate that the textbook prioritizes modern achievement-oriented Chinese culture, while traditional culture, folk customs and indigenous philosophical values remain underrepresented. Furthermore, native cultural content is dominantly presented via explicit reading texts, with insufficient multimodal and interactive cultural tasks. Participants show moderate overall satisfaction with embedded cultural materials, and demand more life-oriented, diversified cultural teaching resources. This study validates the textbook's positive value in fostering students' cross-cultural awareness and national identity, and puts forward targeted optimization strategies for college English textbook compilation and culture-oriented foreign language teaching.

Keywords: *New Progressive College English Integrated Coursebook*, *English Textbook*, *Cultural Representation*, *Chinese Culture*, *Cultural Confidence*

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China highlights the advancement of Chinese modernization and national cultural rejuvenation, wherein foreign language education occupies a pivotal strategic position in constructing world-class universities with Chinese characteristics. Against the backdrop of intensified global exchanges, college English teaching undertakes two core educational missions: empowering students to obtain global communicative proficiency, and equipping them with standardized English discourse to tell authentic Chinese stories, disseminate national cultural voices, and enhance China's international communication capacity.

As core curriculum teaching resources, college English textbooks determine the depth, breadth and systematicness of cultural input in EFL classrooms. Guided by the cultural confidence-oriented teaching requirement, current college English teaching has shifted from Western culture-dominated indoctrination to balanced bidirectional cultural exchange. Nevertheless, college students commonly suffer from intercultural cultural aphasia, namely the inability to express traditional Chinese culture accurately and fluently in English. Accordingly, it is necessary to conduct targeted empirical research on native cultural embedding in mainstream college English textbooks, so as to refine textbook cultural layout and optimize culture-integrated English teaching design.

1.2. Research Significance

Theoretically, this study constructs a multi-dimensional evaluation system for native cultural

elements in EFL textbooks, complementing domestic empirical research on textbook cultural discourse. Practically, it clarifies advantages and defects of cultural layout in targeted textbooks, provides feasible suggestions for textbook revision, and helps teachers integrate Chinese cultural elements into daily English classrooms to cultivate students' national identity and cross-cultural communication competence.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Connotation of Cultural Confidence and National Identity

Cultural confidence is a deep-seated belief in the value, vitality, and resilience of one's own culture. It means much more than just "being proud of your heritage". In foreign language education, it refers to students' cognition, recognition and dissemination willingness of native culture. National identity represents individual emotional belonging to national culture, which does not exclude multicultural recognition, but advocates seeking cultural common ground while reserving differences on the basis of respecting cultural diversity (Zhao, 2024)^[7].

2.2. Overseas Research on Textbook Cultural Representation

Overseas scholars have formed mature theoretical systems for textbook cultural analysis. Byram (2007) proposed integrating dual cultural teaching into language courses, requiring textbooks to balance target-language and local cultural content[3]. Kachru's three-circle classification divides English-use contexts into Inner Circle, Outer Circle and Expanding Circle, which lays a classification basis for cross-cultural textbook research. Most overseas empirical studies prove that mainstream ELT textbooks are dominated by Anglo-American mainstream culture, with obvious cultural preference (Alptekin, 1993; Shin et al., 2011)^{[1][5]}.

2.3. Domestic Research on Chinese Cultural Textbook Embedding

Domestic scholarly research on textbook cultural integration has evolved from unilateral introduction of Anglo-American culture to proactive native cultural output. Existing empirical statistics reveal a severe structural imbalance in mainstream college English textbooks: the proportion of indigenous cultural content merely ranges from 2.1% to 6.25%, which directly causes college students' pervasive cultural aphasia. Relevant studies confirm that current textbooks prioritize contemporary national development and technological achievements, whereas traditional philosophy, folk heritage and intangible cultural arts are marginalized. In addition, most extant studies focus merely on the quantitative proportion of cultural content, lacking systematic evaluation on cultural presentation modes and classroom teaching effects (Geng & Kang, 2021; Zhang & Yu, 2020)^{[4][6]}.

2.4. Research Deficiencies

Three major research gaps can be summarized from previous studies. Firstly, few studies adopt a unified multi-dimensional analytical framework to code and evaluate textbook cultural elements. Secondly, existing research lays excessive emphasis on cultural content quantity, while neglecting the quality, interactivity and contextual adaptability of cultural presentation. Thirdly, limited research combines textbook textual analysis with real feedback from teachers and student end-users, which weakens the practical guiding value of research conclusions.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Byram's Eight Cultural Dimensions

This study adopts Byram's (1993) eight-dimension framework to analyze cultural content in English textbooks from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab. The dimensions include: 1) Social identity (class, region, ethnicity); 2) Social interaction (formality levels); 3) Belief and behavior (morals, religion, routines); 4) Social/political institutions (healthcare, law, governance); 5) Socialization and life cycle (family, school, work, rites); 6) National history (identity-defining events); 7) National geography (significant geographical features); 8) Stereotypes and national identity (typical national symbols)^[2].

3.2. *Shin's Dual Cultural Evaluation Model*

Shin (2011) divides textbook culture into Inner Circle culture, peripheral culture and universal culture, and classifies cultural presentation into knowledge-oriented input and communication-oriented interactive practice^[5]. Most existing textbooks adopt knowledge-oriented cultural presentation with weak interactive design.

3.3. *China's Intercultural Competence Reference Framework*

Proposed by Zhang Hongling's research team, the framework includes three dimensions which are knowledge, attitude and skill, specifying college students' required Chinese cultural knowledge, national identity and cross-cultural dialogue ability, which sets curriculum standards for this research^[8].

3.4. *Ten-Dimensional Chinese Cultural Coding Standard*

Combining the above theories, this study summarizes ten analytical dimensions: philosophical ideology, artistic expression, social customs, linguistic symbol, education system, political governance, economic development, scientific technology, architectural heritage and ecological concept. This standard is adopted for quantitative coding and qualitative evaluation of textbook cultural content.

4. Research Methodology

4.1. *Research Questions*

- (1) What types and quantities of Chinese cultural elements are embedded in the targeted textbook?
- (2) What explicit and implicit modes are adopted to present Chinese culture in the textbook?
- (3) To what extent can textbook cultural content meet teachers' teaching needs and students' cultural learning demands?

4.2. *Research Subjects*

Textbook subject: *New Progressive College English Integrated Coursebook* Volume 1, covering six themed units with unified online WE-Learn digital auxiliary materials. User subjects: 102 non-English major freshmen and 5 frontline college English teachers from Beijing Institute of Petrochemical Technology, all with rich learning and teaching experience of this textbook.

4.3. *Research Instruments*

This study adopts mixed research methods. Text analysis is used to code cultural content distribution; a five-part questionnaire is designed to collect student satisfaction data; semi-structured interview outlines are formulated to obtain teachers' practical teaching feedback.

4.4. *Data Processing*

All questionnaire data is sorted for percentage statistics; interview discourse is transcribed for thematic analysis; textbook cultural elements are coded and counted based on the ten-dimensional cultural standard to ensure data objectivity.

5. Research Findings and Discussion

5.1. *Text Analysis Results*

5.1.1. *Content classification of Chinese culture in the textbook*

As shown in Table 1, cultural distribution is extremely imbalanced. Philosophical values, national technology and modern achievement culture occupy the largest proportion, while social customs, architectural heritage and linguistic symbolic culture are barely involved.

Table 1: Coverage of Chinese Cultural Dimensions in the Integrated Coursebook

Unit Theme	Dominant Cultural Elements	Missing Cultural Elements
Dream Pursuit	Space technology, dedication spirit	Traditional rituals
Freshman Life	Independent education concept	Ethnic culture
Survival Stories	Modern wartime history	Traditional ethics
Chinese Icons	High-speed railway, digital culture	Folk art
Water Governance	Man-nature harmony concept	Traditional ecological wisdom
Digital Detox	Internet governance	Traditional lifestyle culture

More specifically, the dimensions of philosophical and ideological concepts, artistic expressions, and political systems and governance have got the most coverage in the textbook, which presents the philosophical concepts, literature and historical events of China. For example, Yu Min is one of those dedicated Chinese Dream chasers. The value of dedication is reflected in his deeds, and how he loves and values his career by learning with seriousness and responsibility. Similarly, the textbook references several influential historical figures like Fan Zhongyan and Fang Zhimin, linking their lives to artistic and political ideals. However, these entries tend to provide only surface-level mentions of key cultural elements such as famous proverbs and quotations, lacking deeper elaboration or exercises that reinforce learning and cultural appreciation.

The categories of scientific and technological development, educational systems and knowledge transmission, and economic practices and systems receive moderate attention. While China's achievements in space technology, digital transformation, and fights against poverty are mentioned, the coverage is often fragmented and limited to a few examples. These entries would benefit from deeper integration into the thematic units to help students connect cultural context with modern advancements. Therefore, this category can be enriched in future textbooks, which will help boost students' confidence and national pride.

Social customs, architectural heritage and ecological perspectives and environmental practices are virtually absent from current textbooks. This means that current textbooks may lack in-depth coverage of traditional Chinese social customs (e.g., festivals, eating habits) and architectural heritage (e.g., ancient buildings, modern landmarks). Language and symbolic systems (e.g., calligraphy, idioms, or zodiac signs), which are central to understanding Chinese language and thought are not mentioned at all. Even references to architectural heritage are minimal, aside from the brief mention of the Mogao Caves. This indicates a missed opportunity to present a more holistic and immersive picture of Chinese culture. These categories need to be added to provide a more comprehensive picture of Chinese culture.

5.1.2. Distribution and Location of Chinese culture in the textbook

Each unit has different sections such as Opener, Text, Reading 1, Reading 2, Reading 3 (in "WE Learn" app--the online version of the textbook), Garden of Poems/Quotations. Under each section there are some specific articles or topics.

Reading 1 across all units are generally selected from Western sources such as Reader's Digest or LinkedIn, aimed primarily at enhancing English proficiency. As a result, they lack explicit Chinese cultural representation, creating a disconnect in thematic coherence. Exercises also demonstrate limited cultural integration.

Reading 2 is specially designed for topic-related Chinese events and elements, most of which are about modern China's developments as well as some historical events. For instance, Unit 5 is about water crisis in the world, so Reading 2 introduces China's water situation to enable students to get a brief understanding about the water problems China is facing now and raise students' awareness of water conservation. There are some comprehension exercises for Reading 2, most of which are closed questions. It would better cultivate students' understanding of Chinese culture and intercultural awareness if some open questions are designed.

Although the textbook manages to maintain a unified theme within each unit and includes both Eastern and Western cultural materials, the integration of Chinese culture is often unnatural and fragmented. The 'WE Learn' online section Reading 3, aligns well with ideological education goals and meets curriculum standards. However, due to limited student engagement, its impact is often diminished. The Garden of Poems/Quotations, while offering cultural enrichment, is not consistently featured across units, limiting its effectiveness in providing sustained cultural input.

5.1.3. Distribution of explicit and implicit Chinese cultural content in the textbook

Cultural Presentation Methods refer to how cultural content is presented in textbooks, primarily categorized as explicit and implicit. Drawing on Zhou et al. (2019)'s classification of explicit cultural presentation methods, this study defines explicit methods as cultural content embedded in language input materials, including reading/listening/video texts explicitly themed around culture (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2020) and dedicated sections presenting cultural knowledge. Implicit methods refer to cultural content integrated into exercises.

If located in input materials (e.g., texts, videos), it is labeled as explicit.

If located in exercise sections, it is labeled as implicit.

Table 2 Distribution of explicit and implicit Chinese cultural content in the Integrated Coursebook

Unit	Theme	Explicit			Implicit		
		Text	Listening	Pictures	Text	Listening	Pictures
Unit 1	Chinese dream	3	0	2	3	0	0
Unit 2	Education	2	0	1	3	1	0
Unit 3	Stories of World War II	1	0	1	3	0	0
Unit 4	Touching China	5	0	1	7	0	2
Unit 5	Water quality	3	0	0	1	0	0
Unit 6	Cyber problem	1	0	1	5	0	0

Table 2 adopts a classification framework of Explicit and Implicit cultural content, combined with the three dimensions of Text, Listening, and Pictures, to systematically present the distribution characteristics of Chinese cultural elements across textbook units. The design aims to quantify the distribution patterns of cultural content in the textbooks, reveal the strengths and weaknesses of explicit/implicit presentation, and provide a basis for optimizing textbook compilation (e.g., enhancing visual materials, supplementing audio resources), ultimately fostering students' deep understanding and identification with Chinese culture.

Explicit content requires direct transmission of cultural information through language materials. For example, Unit 4's Opener explicitly lists "Touching China" figures (Gu Fangzhou, Su Bingtian, etc.), using text to clearly convey patriotic spirit and role models of the era. Implicit content conveys cultural connotations through contextual details such as city names or historical backgrounds. Examples include references to "Beijing as a blend of tradition and modernity" or "Shenzhen's transformation from a fishing village before reform and opening-up," implicitly reflecting China's developmental narrative.

Beijing, a mixture of the old and the new, surprises and fun. (full)

Before the reform and opening up, the place was not the prosperous city it is now.

Text serves as the core medium for cultural presentation, often combined with images. Pictures have authenticity, such as the use of historical photographs (Shanghai Jewish Refugee Museum in the Unit 3 World War II stories). For example, Unit 4's Reading 2 uses images to showcase China's rapid railway development, highlighting technological progress. Images lack depth and fail to effectively support cultural understanding. For instance, Mogao Caves' murals are insufficiently representative, hindering students' appreciation of traditional art. Many images are decorative or poorly connected to textual content (e.g., Shanghai Pudong's iconic pictures in the "Garden of Quotations" with low thematic relevance).

In addition, Unit 2 and Unit 4 contain a small amount of listening, and the content is rather thin. The lack of listening materials may limit students' opportunities to learn through multimodal learning and affect overall cultural understanding. Audio materials are sparse and lack richness, limiting opportunities for immersive cultural engagement.

5.2. Student Questionnaire Feedback

Figure 1 statistics indicate that 61.76% students hold general satisfaction with textbook cultural

content, and 60.78% students acquire new Chinese cultural knowledge via textbook learning. However, 30% students think cultural content lacks practical life relevance, and most students report single text-based presentation mode reduces learning initiative. Students suggested adding more content on traditional philosophies, dialects and intangible heritage, and modern customs, recommending cross-cultural comparisons and multimedia formats to enhance appeal.

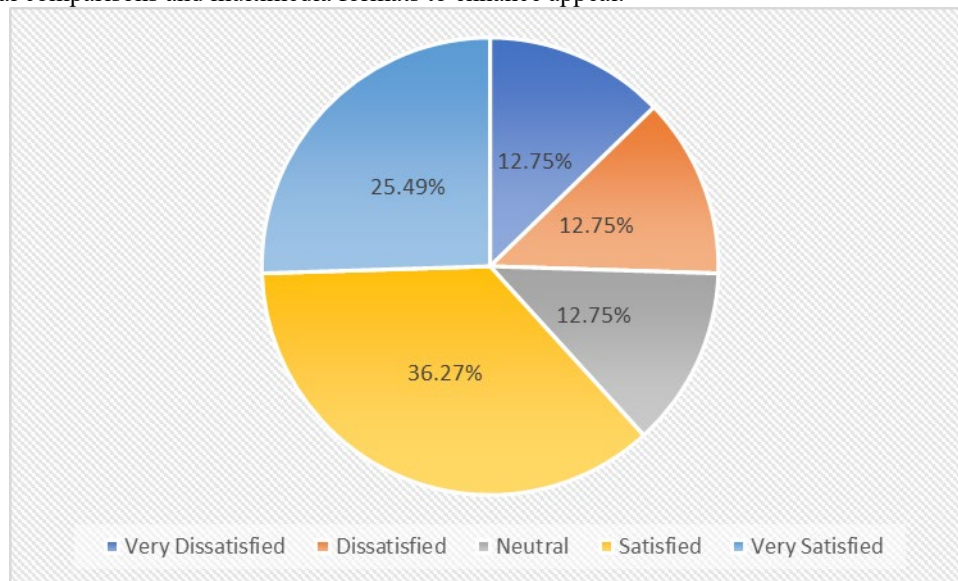


Fig. 1 Overall satisfaction with Chinese culture content in the Integrated Coursebook

5.3. Teacher Interview Feedback

All interviewed college English teachers acknowledge that the revised textbook has added more contemporary Chinese cultural narratives, which facilitates daily culture-integrated classroom teaching. Meanwhile, three prominent practical dilemmas are concluded from teacher interviews: fragmented cultural content arrangement, superficial cultural interpretation without extended connotation, and insufficient cultural output tasks. To fill textbook cultural deficiencies, most teachers have to develop supplementary offline cultural materials independently in routine teaching.

From the interviews, it emerges that teachers recognize a gradual increase in the presence of Chinese cultural content in new editions of English textbooks.

Teachers had mixed views regarding the presence of Chinese culture in university English textbooks. Some acknowledged the inclusion of Chinese cultural elements, particularly in updated editions that feature articles on local education systems, cultural practices, and societal developments. For example, Teacher 1 noted that revised textbooks included new readings with explicit Chinese cultural content. However, other teachers (Teachers 3 and 5) expressed concerns that such content remains limited in both scope and depth, with only occasional mentions of festivals or values.

Most teachers agreed that integrating Chinese culture into English teaching enhances learning, though they approached this goal differently. Teachers 1 and 4 found it beneficial that the reading materials already incorporated relevant content, thereby reducing their preparation time and enabling more smooth integration into the classroom. Teachers 3 and 5, conversely, frequently made use of their own material, including Chinese literary works and historical information, to supplement the textbooks. These additions were generally well-received by students. Nonetheless, concerns were raised about the fragmented and unsystematic presentation of Chinese culture in the textbooks, which may hinder consistent and comprehensive cultural education.

Several challenges were identified, including time constraints, superficial coverage of cultural topics, and the lack of systematic integration of Chinese cultural themes. Teachers suggested that future textbook revisions should aim for more structured and thematic inclusion of Chinese culture. They emphasized the importance of covering a wider range of cultural aspects such as historical events, philosophical traditions, literature, and contemporary societal issues to support intercultural communication competencies.

In conclusion, while efforts have been made to integrate Chinese cultural elements into English

textbooks, more comprehensive and systematic approaches are needed. Teachers play a critical role in supplementing and adapting materials to enrich students' cultural understanding. With thoughtful textbook design and collaborative teaching strategies, the goal of promoting Chinese culture through English education can be more effectively realized.

5.4. Optimization Suggestions

Firstly, supplement underrepresented cultural content including traditional customs, intangible cultural heritage and classical philosophy to balance cultural dimension layout. Secondly, diversify cultural presentation forms, add cultural role-play, cross-cultural comparison and multimodal audio-visual materials. Thirdly, enhance cross-unit cultural thematic coherence, connect traditional culture with modern national development, and design open-ended cultural output tasks to improve students' ability of telling Chinese stories in English.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Main Research Conclusions

First, the targeted textbook realizes positive native cultural embedding, yet prioritizes modern achievement culture with unbalanced cultural dimension distribution. Second, cultural presentation relies excessively on explicit reading texts, lacking interactive and multimodal design. Third, teachers and students recognize textbook cultural value, but propose demands for richer content and diversified presentation modes. Fourth, college English textbook compilation needs to balance traditional and modern Chinese culture, integrate cultural output into language skill training, and serve cultural confidence cultivation.

6.2. Research Limitations

This study only selects one volume of a single set of textbooks, and research samples are limited to one university. Besides, the teacher interview sample size is small, which affects research universality. Follow-up research can expand textbook categories and research samples for comparative analysis.

6.3. Future Research Prospect

Subsequent research can formulate quantitative evaluation standards based on cultural content depth rather than occurrence frequency, and explore AI-assisted cultural textbook compilation paths, to build a systematic college English cultural teaching resource system adapting to cross-cultural communication demands.

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