

# Analysis of Cultural Content on the Beginner-Level Textbooks “Bahasa Tionghoa Zaman Sekarang”

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## ABSTRACT

Language learning and cultural learning are inextricably linked to each other. Foreign language learners who are equipped with cultural understanding will possess "intercultural competence," which is essential in cross-cultural communication. In Indonesia, learning Chinese at the beginner level is still highly reliant on textbooks. Therefore, in determining textbooks, teachers must carefully evaluate every cultural aspect for students to know and comprehend while considering appropriate delivery method options. This research analyzes the beginner-level textbook, "Bahasa Tionghoa Zaman Sekarang," which has a specific target audience, namely learners who speak Indonesian as their first language. The aspects analyzed are the cultural content in the textbook and the method of delivery. This qualitative descriptive research identifies the cultural content data presented in the textbook, whose form of culture and delivery are then described and analyzed. The results of the analysis show that the textbook is remarkably rich in cultural content, especially Chinese culture. The cultural diversity of ideas, activities, and artifacts conveyed in various delivery forms within the textbook greatly supports effective learning of Chinese communication to avoid cultural misunderstandings. Considering the evolving culture and the study that has been done, the authors provide several suggestions to develop the textbook used in the future.

**Keywords:** Textbooks, Chinese language, Cultural content, Delivery media.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language and culture are two interconnected components that cannot be separated. Language is one element of culture [1]. Hence, it has a critical part in the development of a culture. With the existence of language, individuals and groups may communicate more effectively with each other. The study of culture is complex, abstract, and broad [2]. Excellent language mastery in communication is influenced by linguistic proficiency and the ability to interpret language according to context. Thus, a grasp of the speaker's culture is required [3]. By itself, language mastery is insufficient in ensuring communication. Therefore, cultural values imparted through language make it easier for learners to perceive how language is used depending on context. The higher students' language proficiency, the more students learning cultural knowledge also increases [4].

Many Indonesian schools have incorporated Chinese lessons into their official school curricula. Learning Chinese at the beginner level in Indonesia still relies mostly on textbooks. Thus, high-quality textbooks are

required to teach and introduce the Chinese language and culture to beginners. Teaching materials of Chinese as a foreign language have the essential functions of being the basis for teaching and learning, an intermediary for learning inside and outside of the classroom, and a medium for cultural dissemination and communication [5].

In this study, the authors examined the cultural content found in the "Bahasa Tionghoa Zaman Sekarang" textbook. It is one of the products belonging to the Hanban / Confucius Institute Headquarters project on the development of teaching materials. The book was published by Sinolingua Publisher. The intended audience of this textbook is beginner-level learners whose first language is Indonesian [6]. The authors hope that this research can help identify ways/media for delivering good cultural content in a textbook, provide suggestions for the development and use of basic level Chinese textbooks in order to support Chinese communication learning coupled with cross-cultural communication, and promote learners' interest.

In one of the previous similar studies, Purwoko [7] argues that the ideal textbook is expected to reflect socio-

cultural values in the practice of foreign language communication being studied, teach communication strategies with native speakers, and inform the cultural distance between the mother tongue and the language being studied by students. In addition, Sahertian and Vasantadaja [8] also argue that textbooks that introduce how to communicate while taking into account the Chinese cultural background and providing information about social life (family, work, rituals), national identity, social identity, belief, and human character can support the realization of learning objectives, which are to develop Chinese communication skills in various situations and develop insight into Chinese culture and positive attitudes towards Chinese people. From the learning objectives, it is hoped that students can communicate using Chinese by paying attention to Chinese culture without misunderstandings due to cultural differences [8].

## 2. METHODS

This study is a qualitative, descriptive one. The research object for this qualitative study is the beginner-level textbook "Bahasa Tionghoa Zaman Sekarang." The research problem focuses on the cultural materials included in the textbooks as well as the medium/method utilized to deliver the information. The authors determine the cultural data given in the textbook before analyzing and describing the various cultures along with how they are conveyed.

Based on content, Hoenigman classifies cultural forms into:

- (1) Ideas: culture in abstract ideas, ideas, rules, values, and other similar concepts. Generally, the culture of ideas resides in the minds of a group of people and cannot be touched. The culture of ideas can also be expressed in written form as essays, books, etc.
- (2) Activities: culture in the form of patterned actions/activities of a group of people. These patterned actions/activities are formed from human activities in which human beings interact or associate with one another and can also be adapted to customary manners. Cultural activities generally occur in daily human life and can be observed.
- (3) Artifacts: culture that is physical or concrete can be seen or touched. Cultural artifacts result from the actions or activities of a person or group of people [9].

The authors record and identify the cultural content data presented in every chapter of the textbook, which are then categorized into the three forms of culture. Next, the authors describe and analyze the delivery of cultural content used by the textbook. To conclude, the authors analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the textbooks in terms of learning Chinese culture and provide suggestions for the development and use of textbooks.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the authors analyze the cultural content in the "Bahasa Tionghoa Zaman Sekarang" textbook, one of the Hanban/Confucius Institute Headquarters teaching materials published by Sinolingua Publisher. This textbook is intended for beginner-level learners who speak Indonesian as their first language.

### *3.1 Mapping of Cultural Content in Beginner-Level Textbooks "Bahasa Tionghoa Zaman Sekarang"*

The "Bahasa Tionghoa Zaman Sekarang" textbook is divided into three books (textbook, exercise book, and Han character writing practice book). Those three books complete each other and are used coordinately in order to achieve learning objectives and develop the learners' Chinese communication skills. The three books also include a great deal of cultural information, particularly Chinese culture.

The cultural content is introduced to the learners in various forms of presentation in the textbook, exercise book, and Han character writing practice book. Through the mapping on the table above, it can be concluded that Chapter 0 has more cultural content than the other chapters. The reason is that Chapter 0 is used by the textbook writing team to provide basic knowledge about the history of Chinese, greetings in Chinese, and *Hanyu Pinyin* reading practice with various types of idioms/proverbs as an introduction to the Chinese language and culture.

### *3.2 Cultural Content Analysis of "Bahasa Tionghoa Zaman Sekarang" Beginner-Level Textbooks Based on Cultural Diversity Grouping*

Williams states that language and culture are related to each other. Culture has elements of prejudice, habits, values, and traditions that are inseparable from the language used in the communication process. Therefore, language does not serve only as words capable of conveying meaning [10]. Cultural understanding is an essential part of successful language learning. The benefits of cultural learning in learning Chinese are reducing/eliminating the negative effects of cultural differences, increasing students' interest in learning Chinese, and improving students' communication skills [11]. Effective teaching materials may guide instructors in introducing and teaching cross-cultural communication skills, which will help promote Chinese culture [12]. Cultural learning must also be flexible in determining the orientation and boundaries of the cultural content to be taught and the methods in explaining it [13]. The "Bahasa Tionghoa Zaman Sekarang" textbook contains various cultural content that can be categorized

into three forms of culture, namely ideas, activities, and artifacts. The following is a form of culture contained in the "Bahasa Tionghoa Zaman Sekarang" textbook:

(1) Cultural forms of ideas:

Cultural forms of idea talks about the history of the Chinese language, the cardinal directions, the four seasons in China, areas with different climates in China and its uniqueness, the Chinese calendar system, Chinese zodiac signs, idioms (成语 *chengyu*, 歇后语 *xiehouyu*, 惯用语 *guanyongyu*), proverbs, negative expressions of Chinese vocabulary using the letter 狗 (dog), the dragon philosophy for Chinese, the meaning of installing the letter 福 upside down, idioms with four Han characters, and the historical distribution of the Han character type outside of China.

(2) Cultural forms of activities:

Cultural forms of activities refers to saying greetings, ways of greetings, polite greetings, address terms/honorifics for Chinese family members, address terms for relatives and strangers, dressing manners of modern Chinese students, the habit of serving drinks to guests, the Chinese habit of treating/paying for food in restaurants, the custom of the elderly in their spare time, the culture of eating with chopsticks, Chinese business etiquette, the tradition of toasting, the habit of explaining the writing of their own names by mentioning letter components, the translation of the sound of Indonesian names into the Chinese language, various operas in China, Chinese martial arts, the term 师傅 in China, dialects of the Chinese language, Chinese surnames, the hand sign language for numbers 1-10, the politics of family planning in China, the education system, traditional Chinese holidays, holidays in China and Indonesia, the Han character input system, the history of standardization and simplification of Han characters, the introduction to writing book titles in the Chinese language, wedding ceremonies in China, the political economic reform system, the welfare house-distribution system in China, and the important telephone numbers in China.

(3) The cultural form of artifacts:

The cultural form of artifact talks about Images of famous Chinese buildings (Bird Nest, Oriental Pearl Tower, CCTV Tower), Chinese calligraphy equipment, a map of China with locations of major cities in China, a brief geography of China and Indonesia, famous tourist attractions in China, Chinese cuisine/menus, a comparison of culinary variety in China and Indonesia, types of shops in China, telecommunications facilities, means of transportation, traditional Chinese clothing, Han characters, changes in the shape of Han characters, information displays of train schedules in China, ancient Chinese coins, pictograph examples of Han main characters, types of leaves and their uniqueness,

the Chinese currency, animals unique to China, and displays of taxi receipts in China.

Based on the results of grouping the data above, the distribution of cultural content in the "Bahasa Tionghoa Zaman Sekarang" textbook is highly distributed evenly in each of the cultural forms. The cultural content of the book is comprehensive, encompassing cultural knowledge as well as communication culture. However, a closer examination reveals that the textbook favors Chinese cultural elements more than the learners' own culture. Indonesians are the target audience for this book. The learning process becomes more successful by adding aspects of local cultural wisdom into the textbook, making it simpler for learners to grasp and express language while linking cultural factors in dialogue. An excellent teaching material may serve as a guide for instructors in introducing and teaching cross-cultural communication skills. Therefore, it promotes the spread of Chinese culture. The aims of learning Chinese communication must be in accordance with the level of difficulty and the cultural learning objectives defined in the textbook.

Learning various forms of culture, ideas, and activities presented by this textbook aids in achieving learning objectives and develops Chinese communication skills in various situations by taking into account social and cultural values to avoid misunderstandings due to cultural differences. The comparison in the textbook between the cultural elements of the target language studied and the learners' native culture can increase learners' awareness when conducting cross-cultural communication. The "Bahasa Tionghoa Zaman Sekarang" textbook aims to disseminate Chinese culture and facilitate cultural dialogue. Learners are given relevant cultural knowledge in order to comprehend the content of a Chinese interlocutor's conversation, communicate the meaning of using the Chinese language to a speaker with a different cultural background, and communicate Indonesian culture to Chinese-language speakers. The textbook can also improve students' interest in learning, fulfill students' learning needs, and increase students' self-confidence and motivation to learn through the many forms of cultural artifacts and activities introduced in the textbook.

The integration of local wisdom with knowledge of Chinese culture found in the "Bahasa Tionghoa Zaman Sekarang" textbook includes holidays in China and Indonesia, a brief comparison of the geography of China and Indonesia, and a comparison of the culinary varieties of China and Indonesia. This cultural integration supports effective foreign language learning to avoid misunderstandings when using it.

### **3.3 Analysis of How to Deliver Cultural Content in the Beginner-Level Textbook “Bahasa Tionghoa Zaman Sekarang”**

Chinese culture learning objectives taught to learners must be aligned with and blend in with the goals of learning the Chinese language. The combination of Chinese learning and cultural learning can be done in two ways, which are using cultural elements as a part of language learning (e.g., vocabulary, proverbs, rules of language use) or making cultural elements a part of the language learning process as a learning topic (e.g., choosing culinary topics, family, fashion, etc. as discussion topics, text topics, or topics for other learning activities)[14].

As one of the beginner-level Chinese teaching media, the “Bahasa Tionghoa Zaman Sekarang” textbook conveys Chinese cultural content in the forms of:

#### (1) Textbook

1. Images of cultural manifestations of Chinese artifacts on the covers of textbooks, exercise books, and practice books for writing Han characters.
2. A list of Chinese greetings and negative phrases in Han, Hanyu Pinyin characters, and their Indonesian meanings.
3. Vocabulary related to Chinese/Chinese culture.
4. Conversational topics with Chinese cultural references.
5. Cultural comments at the end of each chapter. Each chapter's cultural note format might vary depending on the sort of cultural information included, such as images, tables, and family trees (Han characters, Hanyu Pinyin, meanings in Indonesian), as well as narrative explanations in Indonesian.

#### (2) Exercise book

1. Reading exercises of various types of Chinese idioms and proverbs by displaying *Hanyu Pinyin* and their meanings in Indonesian.
2. Exercises in oral storytelling based on graphic visuals with Chinese cultural elements.
3. Short narrative writing exercises based on illustrated images with Chinese cultural elements.
4. Question-and-answer exercises based on cultural texts containing Chinese cultural content.

#### (3) Han character writing practice book

1. Explanations in understanding Han characters in the forms of supporting narratives and illustrations.

2. Illustrations of the origins of the pictographic letters in each chapter.

In addition, the textbook “Bahasa Tionghoa Zaman Sekarang” also displays Indonesian cultural content as a comparison material between Chinese culture and Indonesian culture. In introducing cultural content to students, it is necessary to have an appropriate comparison with the learners’ native culture to ensure clear understandings and provide suitable content according to the learners’ level of Chinese language proficiency and understanding ability [15]. UNESCO argues that integrated learning must connect and integrate local wisdom with global knowledge by bringing up global cultural content and local culture in textbooks [16]. Cheng also argues that textbooks that introduce content and context of local wisdom can improve the quality of education [16]. Local cultural content and global culture can be integrated into textbooks through reading, supporting, practice, and assignment items [17].

Furthermore, the “Bahasa Tionghoa Zaman Sekarang” textbook includes Indonesian cultural elements as a contrast between Chinese and Indonesian cultures. The combination of local wisdom with knowledge of Chinese culture can be seen in the following:

#### (1) Textbook

1. The textual content of a conversation.
2. Indonesian cultural notes.

#### (2) Exercise book:

1. Exercises in oral storytelling based on graphical pictures.
2. Question-and-answer exercises based on cultural texts.

Learners are taught to converse using the Chinese language with the supply of cultural information in each chapter of the “Bahasa Tionghoa Zaman Sekarang” textbook so as to avoid misunderstandings due to variations in cultural and social backgrounds. The cultural material is explained objectively and in accordance with reality. The distribution technique also employs a way that is acceptable to the target learners and is tailored to their age and degree of Chinese language proficiency. This textbook is suitable for adults, and the delivery technique is also age-appropriate. Images, vocabulary, idioms/proverbs, conversational texts, language use guidelines, cultural/knowledge comments, practice items, and accompanying text assignments are all included in the textbook. Since the textbook’s target learners are beginner-level learners, the majority of Chinese cultural content is given in Indonesian, helping learners study it independently outside of the classroom. Certain Chinese cultural information is sometimes

conveyed through vocabulary and conversational writing. Learners can also use Chinese and Indonesian cultural elements to deliver the Chinese language, both oral and written.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis findings, it can be concluded that the "Bahasa Tionghoa Zaman Sekarang" textbook is an appropriate Chinese language textbook for beginners with a high number of Chinese cultural materials. Textbooks for foreign languages should focus on language abilities and pay attention to introducing related cultural content. The diversity of the cultural forms of ideas, activities, and artifacts conveyed by this textbook in various forms of delivery greatly supports effective learning of Chinese language communication to avoid cultural misunderstandings, increase the awareness of Chinese language learners when conducting cross-cultural communication, and improve students' interest in learning.

Despite all of the benefits, the authors discover some aspects of the "Bahasa Tionghoa Zaman Sekarang" textbook that writers and publishers may still need to improve on in the future, including:

- (1) As cultural artifacts displayed on the cover page are famous buildings, which are one of the main icons of cities in China, they should not only be shown on the cover page. These structures might become the subject of conversational writing, cultural comments, or representations of different types of practice items.
- (2) Illustrated images related to Chinese culture that support the content of conversational texts, explanations of cultural notes, and oral/written communication exercises can be used. With the assistance of pictures, students will be able to envision and comprehend the culture more easily.
- (3) The integration and comparison of learners' native culture with Chinese cultures should be developed further to avoid misconceptions when engaging in genuine cross-cultural communication exchanges. Because the narrative backdrops in this textbook discussion occur in Indonesia and China, the integration and comparison of Indonesian and Chinese cultures may be further developed into a conversational text material. Furthermore, the notion of cultural integration and comparison can be explored in oral or written communication activities based on illustrated visuals and text-based question-and-answer exercises.

In addition to making recommendations for the writers and publishers of the "Bahasa Tionghoa Zaman Sekarang" textbook, the authors also wish to make recommendations for Chinese instructors who utilize it in

their classrooms. Culture continues to evolve. Thus, as the textbook was published in 2010, teachers must offer updated explanations, more supporting visuals, or new exercises on themes connected to chapters based on the current development, for example, the topic of the family planning system in China (as of now, China has already allowed couples to have more than one child), the shopping system in China (shopping online, rather than traveling to the store, is quite popular in China right now), payment media (currently, online payment services such as "Alipay" or "Wepay" are more popular than paying with cash), and telecommunications facilities (the majority of Chinese individuals now communicate with their family/relatives via "Wechat," rather than calling them on the phone).

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