Exploring the Representation of Chinese Culture in College English Textbooks: A Case Study

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Abstract. This study focuses on the textbook *New Horizons College English (the fourth edition)*, and makes an in-depth analysis of the representation of Chinese culture from the perspective of Curriculum Ideology and Politics. The findings are as follows: 1) The content of Chinese culture represented in college English textbooks mainly includes socialism culture and fine traditional Chinese culture; 2) The representation forms of Chinese culture are more balanced and pay attention to the cultivation of cultural expression ability. Based on the analysis of the college English textbooks, this study has a discussion on the content proportion and form of Chinese culture that should be presented in college English textbooks.

Keywords: College English textbooks, Cultural Representation in Textbooks, Content of Cultural Representation, Form of Cultural Representation

1 Introduction

Textbooks, as cultural products, are the most authoritative source for presenting cultural and linguistic content [1]. For this sense, college English textbooks are important to promote students' language learning, spread Chinese culture, understand the culture of English-speaking countries and the world's multi-culture. In recent years, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China has successively issued documents, such as *The Measures for the Administration of Teaching Materials in Colleges and Universities* issued in 2019 as well as The *College English Curriculum Requirements* issued in 2020, stating that college textbooks must reflect the will of the party and the country, and should integrate Chinese culture, guiding students to strengthen their confidence in Chinese culture, making them shoulder the great responsibility of rejuvenating the Chinese nation and shaping their correct outlook on the world, life and ethical standards. In view of this, this study examines the representation of Chinese culture in a set of recently published college English textbooks in China, namely *New Horizon College English (4th Edition),* in order to provide reference for the compilation of English textbooks and college English teaching for teachers.

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2 Literature Review

The study of cultural analysis in English textbooks is rather little and most of the studies are carried out from the perspective of regions and countries. For example, Yamada analyzed six Japanese English textbooks and found that the proportion of American culture exceeded that of Japanese culture in the textbooks [2]. Risager pointed out the problem of English teaching materials which mainly focus on the British and American cultures while ignoring the cultures of other countries [3]. Yuen analyzed two sets of English textbooks for middle schools in Hong Kong and found that the two sets of textbooks mainly represent the culture of the target language countries, while Asian and African cultures are least represented [4]. Also, Keles & Yazan analyzed the primary school English textbook *New Headway Elementary* published by Oxford University Press and found that the cultural content in all five versions of the textbook is mainly about British, American, and European cultures, with sporadic cultures of non-English speaking countries presented [5]. In addition to focusing on the content of cultural presentation, there are also a few studies focusing on the form of cultural presentation. For example, Weninger & Kiss analyzed two sets of Hungarian English textbooks and found that the texts, pictures and tasks in the textbooks are all constructing meaning, but they are more focused on improving students' language ability and seldom pay attention to cultural connotations [6].

By combing through the researches at home and abroad, it is found that most studies argue that there is an absence of native culture in English textbooks and the uneven representation of different regional cultures in textbooks, which affect students' understanding of multiculturalism and hinder their development of global cultural awareness. In addition, previous studies paid more attention to the content of cultural presentation and less attention to the form of cultural presentation. Therefore, by analyzing the representation of Chinese culture in the newly published textbook *New Horizon College English (the fourth edition)* systematically, this study examines what and how the Chinese cultures are represented in the textbooks, so as to put forward some suggestions on integrating native culture into English textbooks. □

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

This study aims to explore the following two questions:(1) What kind of Chinese culture do college English textbooks represent? (2) How is the Chinese cultural content represented in the textbooks?

3.2 The Selected Textbooks

The college English textbook *New Horizon College English* is the main choice for non English major undergraduate students in China and it has a high usage rate nationwide. The first edition of the textbooks was released in 2001, and has been updated every

seven years since then (second edition in 2008; third edition in 2015; fourth edition in 2023). This study selects volumes 1-4 of the fourth edition as the research object, each volume containing 6 units, each unit consisting of 3 texts and relative exercises and tasks.

3.3 Data Analysis

The analysis is based on the Framework for Analyzing the Representation of Cultures in English Textbooks [7], which was developed based on a pilot study on cultural representation in four series of English textbooks for college students [8]. The coding analysis includes content and forms. The content of Chinese culture can be categorized by fine traditional Chinese culture, revolutionary culture, and socialist culture. The forms of cultural representation mainly involves explicit and implicit representations. Explicit representation refers to the Chinese cultural content that appears in the language input part, and implicit presentation refers to the exercises and tasks in textbooks. The coding procedures are as follows: firstly, read through the textbooks and search and identify cultural items page by page. Secondly, take down the relevant information in detail (such as theme, volume, unit, page) in an Excel spreadsheet. Based on a detailed reading of the textbooks, a total of 199 Chinese cultural items were obtained. After multiple rounds of proofreading and adjustment between the code and the content of the textbook, this study obtained a total of 26 cultural themes. Finally, all these cultural themes will be classified under the categories of fine traditional Chinese culture, socialist culture and revolutionary culture, thus completing the coding of Chinese culture in the textbooks.

4 Findings and Discussion

4.1 The Content of Chinese Culture Represented in the Textbooks Mainly Covers Socialist Culture and Fine Traditional Chinese Culture

Regarding the categories of Chinese culture, socialist culture was represented the most in the textbooks, with a total of 128 items accounting for 64%. Followed by fine traditional culture, with a total of 65 items accounting for 33%, and revolutionary culture, with a total of 6 items accounting for 3%. It can be seen obviously that the content of Chinese culture represented in textbooks mainly covers socialist culture and fine traditional Chinese culture (see Table 1).

Table 1. The represented Chinese culture in the textbooks.

Categories	Chinese cultural themes
fine traditional culture (65)	traditional literature and art (29); historical events (14); traditional morality (3); national geographic (7); traditional life (6); language and culture (3); national image (2); social events (1)

socialist culture (128)	famous figure (21); new national image (18); economic development (29); space flight and aviation (13); social life (9); science and technology (8); environmental protection and emission reduction (10) education (6); sports (4); intercultural communication (3); concept of governing (6); entertainment (1)
revolutionary culture (6)	Patriotism (1); international friends (1); old revolutionary base areas (1) Land Reform (1); revolutionary documentary (1); education in national defense knowledge (1)

Regarding the category of fine traditional Chinese culture, the coding results indicate that the textbooks represent a significant amount of traditional literature and art, accounting for nearly half of all traditional Chinese culture. For example, the homepage of each unit usually quotes classic content from traditional cultural classics as introductions, such as *the Book of Rites, Xunzi, the Tao Te Ching* and so on. In addition, historical events and figures are also important categories of fine traditional Chinese culture, including Confucius and Confucianism, the philosopher Zhu Xi, the patriotic general Yue Fei, the diplomat Zhang Qian, the navigator Zheng He, and the travel writer Xu Xiake.

Regarding the category of socialist culture, the textbooks represent a rich collection of famous figures, sports, economic development, new national image, science and technology, environmental protection and emission reduction, governance philosophy, diverse lifestyles, education, aerospace and entertainment industries. Among them, famous figures take a large portion, such as Yuan Longping, known as the "Father of Hybrid Rice", the geophysicist Huang Danian, Wang Wenbiao, the "son of the desert", Ciring Dandar, a mountain climbing guide known as "environmental protection guard", Gou Yingda, an entrepreneur, and Ma Jun, a teacher in rural area who helped his father run the school. In addition, the textbooks also represent China's achievements in rural revitalization, urban changes, economic development, and other aspects in recent years, presenting learners with a youthful and admirable national image.

However, the textbooks only represent little revolutionary culture. Among the four textbooks, only two units involve revolutionary cultural elements. On the one hand, Unit 5 of book 1 introduces the historical events of international friends Isabel Crook and David Crook who were active in the revolutionary areas of Taihang Mountains during China's land reform period. On the other hand, Unit 4 of book 2 introduces the origin and background of The May Fourth Spirit, highly praising the new form and style of the May Fourth Spirit embodied by Chinese youth in the new era.

It is not difficult to see that this tendency mainly lies in the guidance of relevant national policies which clearly stated that the content of ideological and political education in curriculum should strengthen the education of fine traditional Chinese culture, vigorously promote the national spirit centered on patriotism and the spirit of the times centered on reform and innovation, and educate and guide students to deeply understand the essence and value of fine traditional culture, which emphasizes benevolence, people first, honesty, justice and harmony.

4.2 The Proportion of Explicit and Implicit Representation of Chinese Culture Is Balanced

As mentioned earlier, the representation of Chinese culture can be divided into two forms: explicit and implicit representation. Explicit presentation refers to the input part of the textbook whereas the implicit representation refers to the output part. Specifically, each unit of the textbooks includes ten modules, which can be divided as the input part (including Quotation, Preview, Text A, Text B, stories of China) and the output part (including Language focus, Structure Analysis and Writing, Collocation, Translation, Unit Project).

The coding results show that the ratio of explicit and implicit representation in the textbooks is more balanced, which is 44.17% and 58.33% respectively. In terms of explicit presentation, the cultural items are represented in the following unit modules: Quotation (16 occurrences, accounting for 6.35%), Preview (11 occurrences, 4.37%), Text A (26 occurrences, 10.32%), Text B (6 occurrences, 2.38%), and Stories of China (47 occurrences, 18.65%). Among them, the module of Stories of China represents the most Chinese culture, such as Tai Chi, martial arts, yangko, Chang'e-4, the city of Dunhuang in Gansu Province and so on. In addition, text A of Unit 3 in Volume 3 mentions famous historical sites such as the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, and Tian Aan Men Square from the perspective of foreign tourists.

While in terms of implicit representation, the cultural items are represented in the following unit modules: Language focus (76 occurrences, 30.16%), Structure Analysis and Writing (1 occurrence, 0.40%), Collocation (7 occurrences, 2.78%), Translation (52 occurrences, 20.63%), and Unit Project (4 occurrences, 1.59%). Among which, the exercises about translation and topic writing aim to improve the learners' language proficiency while enhancing their cultural communicative abilities. And the task as unit project aims to cultivate their cultural understanding, such as Unit 2 of Volume 3 requiring students to choose one or more contemporary Chinese celebrities to give keynote speeches, Unit 1 of Volume 4 requiring students to engage in role-playing in smart cities to experience smart living in China and so on.

It was found that the textbooks represent Chinese culture explicitly through cultural discourse and implicitly through exercises and tasks in a balanced way. And it is not clear which is more effective, explicit or implicit [7], but the two forms of representation can play different roles in teaching and learning. On the one hand, the input of Chinese culture allow learners to understand Chinese culture, on the other hand, the output part help learners to use foreign languages to tell story of China, spread Chinese thought so as to enhance the country's soft power in the world.

5 Conclusion

The findings show that the fourth edition of the textbooks pays attention to the important role of the textbooks in personality cultivation and value shaping. On the one hand, through the cultural theme setting and rigorous material selection, the textbooks organically integrate the socialist core values and fine traditional Chinese culture into the content, helping to shape and enhance the moral literacy of college students. On the

other hand, the textbooks change the previous tendency of emphasizing the culture of the target language and undervaluing Chinese culture. By introducing a large number of Chinese cultural items through rich and diversified representation forms, they help college students consolidate their national cultural identity, deepen patriotism, and strengthen their confidence in Chinese culture. But no textbook is perfect. The content analysis shows that there is an obvious lack in the representation of revolutionary culture. Revolutionary culture is an important and unique part of Chinese culture, which should be reflected in textbooks. Further, the representation of cultural products and cultural community is very scarce. Therefore, more types of Chinese culture can be added in order to promote students' understanding of the diversified Chinese culture, and more exercises and tasks can be designed in order to cultivate students' ability to tell Chinese stories in English in the updating of the textbooks in the future.

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