

Research on Spreading Chinese Cultural in the Framework of Student-Text Dialogue

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Abstract: The spread of Chinese culture to the world is of great significance in the current era. As a compulsory course for international students, *China Overview* is aiming at helping international students to understand China and cultivate international students who are knowledgeable about China and friendly to China. This paper analyses the content settings, key chapters and writing concepts of two *China Overview* textbooks that are currently in large circulation, commonly used in our university, as well as the distribution of the content, the writing angle and the hotspots of concern from the students' final assignments in the last two years. It is found that the course materials have achieved the popularization of relevant basic knowledge and realized the course objectives quite well, but the hotspots of students' concern do not overlap with the key points introduced in the textbooks to a high extent and the students' concern for current affairs hotspots as well as China's new development cannot be satisfied in class. Based on this, it is concluded that the teaching materials should play the role of popularization and guidance, and serve as the basic materials for knowledge learning, but there should be an accompanying database updated from time to time to provide more information about the hot topics and new developments, which could also provide students with relevant information on their points of interest to study by themselves. In addition, more open-ended or experiential questions should be provided in the exercise section to encourage students to carry out personalized exploration.

Keywords: China Overview Textbooks; Spread of Chinese Cultural; International Students Education

1. The Globalization of Chinese Culture

The spread of Chinese culture to the world is of great significance in the current era, and Xi Jinping, the general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee has repeatedly emphasized the importance of *Cultural Confidence*, but it is not easy to achieve accurate and effective dissemination. As to national cultural communication, information is transmitted to the public through various types of media, and then is judged by the public, which means the scale and standard of judgement are on the sides of the public, instead of the propagandist's will or efforts, so the role of the communication media is particularly important. Generally speaking, the communication channels of national culture can be divided into three — government, media and civil society. Among them, although the government channel has the greatest influence and widest scope, it also has certain limitations due to the special characteristics of the government background. The media channel is easily affected by those who have the right to speak and to control the public opinion, which may lead to deficiencies and bias. Comparatively speaking, civil society communication possesses the special advantages that the first two channels do not have, and because of its unofficial background, it can be accepted by the public in a more peaceful way, making the voices of national communication more diversified.

International students coming to China are a special group in civil society communication, and this specialty is reflected in the fusion of the sense of alienation and the sense of intimacy. Generally speaking, due to their own cultural backgrounds, international students inevitably have a sense of being alienated from Chinese culture; however, at the same time, they are also the ones who experience Chinese culture themselves, and the perceptions they gain are incomparable to those of ordinary tourists and readers. In international

communication and interaction, while it is important to take the initiative to display, making full use of others to achieve the dissemination of Chinese culture can achieve twice the result with half the effort. The special characteristics of international students make them more persuasive and credible in spreading Chinese culture. International students from the target country can explain and introduce the foreign culture in native language that is more acceptable to the audience, and because they share the same cultural background, it is easier for them to attract the audience and gain their trust. Western developed countries such as the United States have recognized this long ago, and have regarded international students education as an important part of their national cultural diplomacy strategy, as well as an important means of enhancing national soft power.

Among the relevant courses of international students education, *China Overview* is the one that provides the most direct introduction of Chinese culture. Because of its importance, it has long been listed as one of the compulsory courses. However, due to the large scale of international students taking this course, their different countries, academic qualifications, cultural and professional backgrounds, and their varying levels of Chinese language proficiency, there is no uniform syllabus yet. In the teaching process, there is a dialogue between the students and the textbook, in which the textbook narrates the content of the course, and the students accept and understand it, and re-narrate it under certain circumstances. This *Framework of Student-Textbook Dialogue* is common in all kinds of classroom teaching, and *China Overview* is no exception. Under this framework, is the information delivered effectively? Are the contents chosen of real

interest to students? And does students' cognitive processing of these material affect the effectiveness of communication? In order to answer these questions, this paper will take the narratives of Chinese cultural in the *China Overview* textbooks and the students' re-narratives as the basis of an interactive analysis under the *Framework of Student-Textbook Dialogue*, and explore the possibilities of effective cultural communication by international students.

2. Narrative of China in the China Overview Textbooks

Among the existing textbooks of *China Overview*, combining with the actual use of the textbooks in our university at present, Xiao Li's *China Overview Tutorial* (the Textbook for Undergraduates of International Students Published by Peking University Press in 2009) and Ning Jiming's *A Survey of China* (the Textbook for Chinese Government Scholarship Students, Edited by Beijing Language and Culture University Press in 2013) are selected as the objects of this study. The narratives of China in the two textbooks will be analyzed from three aspects, including the content setting, the key chapters and the writing concepts.

2.1 The Content Setting

As to the arrangement of the chapters in the textbook, both of the textbooks have a wide range of content and knowledge, involving China's history, politics, economy, culture and so on, covering all aspects of China's national conditions. If one can carefully study and master the relevant content, he/she will be able to have a quite systematic understanding and knowledge of China. However, there are some differences in the details of each chapter.

Table1.The Content Setting

<i>China Overview Tutorial</i> Edited by Xiao Li (2009)	<i>A Survey of China</i> Edited by Ning Jiming (2013)
4 Units 20 Chapters	15 Chapters
I China's Natural and Humanistic Conditions 1. China's Land and Resources – 10 pages 2. Ancient History – 9 pages 3. China's Population – 9 pages 4. China's Ethnic Groups – 11 pages II Chinese Politics 5. China's Political System – 7 pages 6. the Multi-party Cooperation and Political Consultation	1. National Flag, National Emblem, National Anthem – 8 pages 2. China's Administrative Divisions – 16 pages 3. China's Geography and Resources – 10 pages 4. China's Population,

System under the Leadership of the Communist Party of China – 8 pages	Nationalities, Languages and Writing Systems – 20 pages
7. The President of the People's Republic of China and Government Institutions – 4 pages	5. China's History – 22 pages
8. China's National Defense – 10 pages	6. China's Political System – 12 pages
9. China's Diplomacy – 15 pages	7. China's Economy – 12 pages
III China's Economy	8. China's Diplomacy – 12 pages
10. Overview of China's Economy – 6 pages	9. Science and Technology in China – 12 pages
11. Agriculture – 6 pages	10. China's Education – 16 pages
12. Industry – 8 pages	11. China's Traditional Thought – 16 pages
13. Development of the Tertiary Sector – 11 pages	12. Chinese Literature – 18 pages
14. Finance and Insurance in China – 5 pages	13. Chinese Art – 24 pages
IV Chinese Society	14. Chinese Customs – 16 pages
15. Environmental Conditions and Environmental Protection in China – 6 pages	15. Physical Fitness in China – 12 pages
16. People's life – 9 pages	
17. Education – 6 pages	
18. Science and Technology in China – 9 pages	
19. China's Cultural Construction – 9 pages	
20. China's Press and Publication – 6 pages	

Xiao Li's *China Overview Tutorial* takes the four dimensions —the Natural and Humanistic Conditions, Politics, Economy, Society as a narrative framework. Compared to Ning Jiming's *A Survey of China*, the framework is the more concise, but the specific description focuses on different aspects. For example, in Xiao's textbook, the Chapter of China's politics is divided into five subsections, with more than 40 pages, which is 50% more than the other one. The Chapters about economy are about the similar situation. Xiao's has more pages and the chapter division is more detailed, but the breadth of content is not enough, while Ning Jiming's textbook emphasizes more on systematic and comprehensive in content arrangements, basically constitutes an all-round demonstration of China. The overall distribution of the volume of chapters are more uniform, which guaranteed the breadth of the teaching, but the depth is not enough. At the same time, Ning added some materials to make the content with stronger sense of times. For example, in the chapter of Chinese Literature, there is an introduction to *Internet Literature and Post-80s Writers*, which is one of the features of this textbook.

The two textbooks have their own characteristics, and there are differences in the presentation of similar content. For example, when *A Survey of China* introduces China's administrative divisions, it gives a brief introduction for each province, city,

autonomous region, and special administrative region, but the other textbook only gives a Table of China's Administrative Divisions, which provides a simple list. However, there is no difference in substance due to the authenticity and factual nature of the data and other basic information. The content of the other chapters presents similar characteristics, being fairly consistent in the overall presentation of basic information, but with its own focus. Due to space constraints, both textbooks are difficult to give an in-depth presentation of a particular aspect. During the process of teaching, if a student is particularly interested in a certain topic, the content taught in class often fails to satisfy his/her learning needs, and the relevant information can only be supplemented by the instructor or collected by the students themselves. This characteristic of this course may fail to meet the needs of the students in class potentially, but it also leaves a greater scope for teaching and learning.

2.2 The Key Chapters

The content of the two textbooks is quite repetitive, and the following is a compilation of the key chapters from each textbook.

Xiao Li's *China Overview Tutorial* provides a more detailed introduction to China's economy. It takes a whole unit to give relatively detailed sectors: Overview, Three Major Industries, Financial and Insurance in China, with longer length. It also pays attention to *Environmental Conditions and Environmental Protection in*

China, People's life, which are the special features of this textbook.

Ning Jiming's *A Survey of China* has independent chapters on the *National Flag*, *National Emblem*, *National Anthem*, and *Sports and Fitness*, introducing the historical stories behind the birth of the national flag, national emblem, and national anthem, as well as the traditional sports in China, including the great spectacle of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, which highlights the characteristics of the times. It is the feature of this textbook.

2.3 The Writing Concepts

Comparing the content and the key chapters of the textbooks, it can be seen that the *China Overview* textbooks are characterized with broad coverage, similar elements and the universality of the materials. Consistent with what is stated in the preface of the textbook, Xiao Li's *China Overview Tutorial* attempts to provide a comprehensive introduction to all aspects of contemporary China, and opens up special chapters on topics that are developing and changing more rapidly, while Ning Jiming's *A Survey of China* puts more emphasis on the systematic and comprehensive content, trying to highlight the characteristics of the times in the textbook, and adds a large amount of photographic information in the layout to enhance the visual experience.

In general, although the editors differ in the selection and arrangement of specific contents, they are more consistent in understanding and positioning of the teaching materials of *China Overview*, aiming to provide international students with a comprehensive and specific introduction of China to help them understand China. As a result, in terms of the concept of writing, the two teaching materials are generally the same, with an emphasis on helping international students to understand China systematically, and presenting as much as possible a comprehensive image of China. In addition, both of them hope that the teaching contents will highlight the times to be more contemporary and show the latest Chinese outlook. Thus, after studying this course, can international students understand China according to the original intention of the textbook writers in their narratives?

3. International Students' Re-Narratives of China

As a university with a long history of international student education, *China Overview* is a compulsory course for international students in China, and one of the examination contents of the course is that students are required to complete a paper with the topic *China in My Eyes*. In order to decipher the international students' re-narrative of China, an attempt was made to take the papers of academic international students (including undergraduates and postgraduates) of our university in the last two academic years of 2021-2023 as a research object to be analysis, and a total of 122 essays were collected.

3.1 Distribution of Paper Content

Referring to the chapter division in the two textbooks, it can be seen that although the content of the students' papers covers a wide range of aspects, they pay more attention to the aspects of basic information about China, such as Chinese culinary culture, Chinese customary culture, Chinese traditional art, and Chinese people, while a number of students also mention China's economic development, China's foreign relations, the situation of China's cities, China's religious culture and so on. The number and distribution of the articles are shown in the fig1 and fig2.

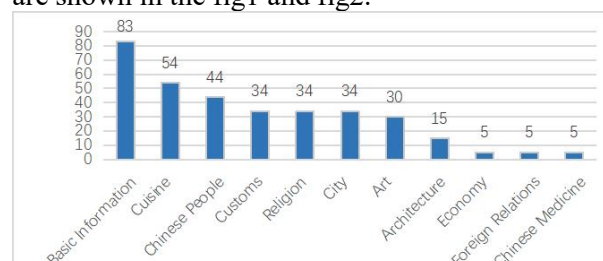


Figure 1. The Number of the Articles in Different Aspects

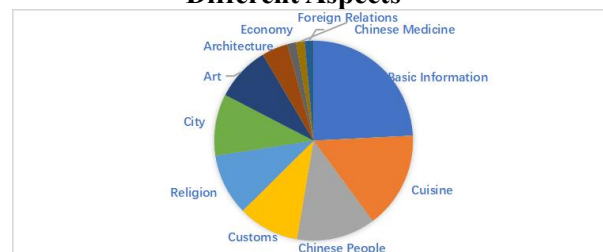


Figure 2. The Distribution of the Articles in Different Aspects

It can be seen that the number and distribution of the articles are already different from the narratives about China in the textbooks. For example, Chinese education, which is an independent chapter in both textbooks, does not occupy an important position in the students'

papers, and there is not much attention paid to a specific industry, which shows that the most concerned points have already been colored by personal choice rather than being told by the textbooks, that is to say, the international students narrate China in their own language. This image of China actually is the image presented to the whole world, which is constructed by the students' narratives, especially when their concerns are brought together. It is not only formed based on the information from the textbooks, but also integrated with their own life experience and cognition, which really plays a key role in foreign propaganda.

3.2 International Students' Re-narratives of China's Image

By analyzing the image of China narrated by international students from the above statistics, the following points can be seen.

First of all, international students pay more attention to China's basic information, with 68% of the articles involving basic information about China, but from the specific content of the articles, this concern is mostly concentrated on the three major aspects, such as 'a long history', 'a large population' and 'a vast area', and the expression is mostly superficial information, with little specific and in-depth information shared, such as the number of dynasties that China has gone through, the situation of the change of dynasties, the characteristics of the distribution of the population, or the historical changes of China's land area, and so on.

Secondly, as international students are studying and living in China, their contact with Chinese people is inevitable, thus, their concern for people has become one of the most important parts of their retelling of China. Due to the influence of their own traditions, customs, cultural values and so on, people from different countries may differ in their attitude and style to life with local people, which is the most important aspect that needs to be adapted to while studying abroad, therefore Chinese people naturally become one of the focuses of attention.

Thirdly, culinary culture and customary culture are the other two hot spots, accounting for 44% and 28% respectively, showing that international students are quite interested in China's traditional food and cultural practices.

There are many reasons for this, for example, the significant differences between China's traditional food and cultural practices and those of their home countries stimulate the curiosity and interest of international students, and the unique flavors and diversity of China's traditional food fill international students with a sense of freshness. At the same time, both aspects are crucial for international students in terms of integrating into the local society, understanding Chinese history and traditional values.

Fourthly, 25% of the articles are about art and culture and 15% are about architecture culture, which shows that international students are interested in Chinese art and architecture. Chinese art and architecture culture has a long history, not only carries rich history and tradition, but also shows the aesthetic value of oriental flavor, so the students are easily attracted by them, and become interested in this oriental beauty. By paying attention, appreciating and learning, they will gain a deeper understanding of Chinese society, history, civilization and even philosophical thinking, which broaden their aesthetic horizons.

Fifth, in addition to China's basic conditions and related traditions, modern urban conditions, economic development and foreign relations have also attracted the attention of a considerable number of international students, which means students are paying more attention to current affairs. In recent years, China's development has brought a great deal of opportunities and challenges, and its increasingly important role in international affairs has influenced the global political and economic landscape. International students who choose to study in China generally believe that this experience will bring them better development, and as these current events are more relevant to their real lives, it is not difficult to understand the concern for these aspects.

Finally, in addition to the main concerns mentioned above, there are also a certain number of topics dealing with religious culture, medical culture and other aspects, showing the diversity of China's image in the eyes of international students, which also indicates that they have noticed the influence of various factors such as China's vast territory, cultural diversity, large population, economic

differences, and so on. This diversity enables international students to experience rich cultural, social and professional life in China and form a more comprehensive perception of China, so that the image of China narrated by them can be more three-dimensional and vivid. On the whole, international students' attention to China is multi-layered and multi-dimensional, including traditional cultural elements as well as modern social development and international relations. This reflects that international students' re-narratives of China's image after taking the *China Overview* course not only cover a wide range of areas, but also incorporate personal colors and show their interests and understanding of China in many aspects.

4. Analysis of the Links and Differences

4.1 Comparison between the Textbook Narratives and the Students' Re-narratives

(1) From the same perspective of narrative, both textbooks spend a lot of space on the basic situation of China, covering the land, population, ethnicity, language, political system and so on, which obviously gives international students a clearer understanding of the basic situation of China, and this part also accounts for a high proportion of students' narratives, which is an overlap of the contents and perspectives between the textbook and the students. This overlap is also reflected in the customary culture and art culture, which are the most representative aspects in the discussion of cultural differences and cultural exchanges, and to which both the textbooks and the students pay much attention.

(2) From the different perspective of the narratives, though the character traits of the Chinese people, architectural culture, medical culture and so on, which are of concern to the international students, are mentioned in the textbook, they are not taking whole chapters, while literature, education, science and technology and so on, which are of concern to the textbooks, are not the center of attention in the international students' re-narratives. In other words, the image of China presented in the textbook is not completely reproduced in the international students' retellings, but changes, and the angle of change is not small. What's more, in terms of the embodiment of narrative differentiation, even when the

narrative perspectives are the same, there are differences between the textbook and the students in terms of specific representations, for example, the international student's re-narrative rarely touches on the political system of China, and tends to focus on the dialect he has access to.

4.2 Analysis of Causes of Variances

As to the reason for these differences and similarities, it is believed to be the combination of universal textbook content and personalized life experience, on other words, the textbook narratives is the foundation to develop personalized re-narratives affected by the students' personal experiences, and when these re-narratives are merged together, they form a new round of narratives about China in the eyes of the students, which is really decisive for the international shaping and dissemination of China's image.

The textbooks are geared towards the students, while students are individual beings, thus there must be individual characteristics, which can be roughly divided into three aspects:

- (1) There are differences and similarities between the aspects that students are interested in and what are introduced in the textbooks.
- (2) There are differences and similarities between the contents that students are willing to understand in depth and what is actually taught the textbooks.
- (3) There are differences and similarities between the students' understanding of China, based on their own experience, and the textbooks.

In the *Framework of Student-Text Dialogue*, the following points can be seen.

- (1) The textbook achieves the popularization of the relevant basic knowledge quite well and achieves certain curriculum objectives;
- (2) The hotspots of students' concern and the key points introduced in the textbook have a limited degree of overlap, showing that there is a deviation between the textbook and the students' points of interest;
- (3) Even though the textbook wishes to present the characteristics of the times, the students are not satisfied by the textbook in understanding the hotspots of current affairs as well as the new development, which shows an obvious characteristic of going beyond the textbooks;
- (4) In the excavation of knowledge points, the depth that the interested content of students

personally is much higher than the introduction of relevant knowledge in the textbooks;

(5) As to the presentation, except for the proper nouns, the students' acceptance of the language of the textbook is limited, and they are more inclined to interpret the relevant concepts or phenomena in their own understanding and depict them.

5. Strategies and Suggestions

Based on the above analyses and conclusions, it can be seen that the textbooks of *China Overview* do play a positive role in the education of China's national conditions, conveying objective, rich and positive information to the international students, helping them to gain a deeper understanding of the various aspects of China and to form a more comprehensive perception of China. However, at the same time, it should be noted that the differences and similarities reflected in the students' retelling of China, especially the differences, which fully reflect that students have their own choices and focuses in their understanding of China and the China re-narrated by them has brought up the characteristics of this group.

Based on this situation, in the education of international students about China's national conditions, and the shaping of China's image and publicity, the specificity and cultural differences as well as the characteristics of this group should be taken into account. Therefore, the special characteristics and cultural differences of this group should be fully considered, and in the selection of contents, the contents that international students would like to learn and listen to should be chosen, and guided or introduced from the angle that they are easier to understand.

In addition to giving full play to the role of popularization and guidance, serving as the basic material for knowledge learning to introduce students to all aspects of China in a broad and comprehensive manner, the textbooks of *China Overview* should also meet the following points.

(1) Build a supporting and timely updated database, which not only introduces the current hot topics and new developments in China, but also provides students with relevant information for their self-learning on their own interest points. Education of China's national conditions should not only stay in the

traditional aspect, but should also fully introduce the modern national conditions, which is also an aspect that international students are very interested in learning about.

(2) Provide more open-ended thinking questions, encourage and guide students to carry out personalized exploration. From the viewpoint of the course itself, the examination of the course on China's general conditions should not be all about the recitation of objective questions, but should be able to help the students to have a more in-depth and comprehensive understanding or understanding of China through the study of the course. From the perspective of the teaching objectives and effects of the course, the emphasis is on cultivating international friends who know China and are friendly to China, which should be embodied in the preparation of the teaching materials.

(3) The teaching materials can give teachers some specific suggestions on how to use the materials, such as the contents of the suggested self-study, the topics that can be discussed, and the sources of data collection. This is a great teaching aid for both novice local and non-local teachers, and even for veteran teachers. Through the joint efforts of textbooks-teachers-students, the teaching effect in the classroom can be improved, and the education on China's national conditions can be really well-done.

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