

A Study on the Cultural Representation in the Compulsory Textbooks of High School English

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Abstract: Under the context of English globalization and the multicultural education requirements of the new curriculum standards, the quality of cultural representation in English textbooks is crucial for cultivating students' intercultural competence. This study focuses on the three volumes of the 2019 edition of the FLTRP High School English compulsory textbooks. Using the analytical framework developed by Zhang Hong and Li Xiaonan and employing content analysis, it investigates the characteristics of geographical distribution and type composition of cultural representations. The findings reveal: in terms of geographical distribution, common culture (38%) and native culture (30%) are dominant, while international culture (13%) accounts for a relatively low proportion; in terms of type composition, cultural products (48%) are the primary form of representation, with content on cultural communities absent, showing a progression from material to spiritual culture. The conclusions may provide references for textbook writers to balance cultural distribution and for teachers to optimize intercultural teaching, thereby helping to achieve the new curriculum standard's goal of cultivating "intercultural communication competence with both Chinese identity and international perspective."

Keywords: Textbook Analysis; Cultural Representation; High School English; Cultural Competence; FLTRP Edition Textbooks

1. Introduction

As the core text of the curriculum and an important vehicle for cultural transmission[1], the quality of cultural representation in textbooks directly impacts the cultivation of high school students' intercultural competence. The new curriculum standards issued in 2020

explicitly require textbooks to help cultivate "learners with Chinese identity, an international perspective, and intercultural communication skills." Against this backdrop, systematically analyzing the characteristics of cultural representation in High School English textbooks is of great significance for achieving educational goals. This study focuses on the three compulsory textbooks of the 2019 FLTRP High School English edition, employing content analysis based on the framework of Zhang Hong and Li Xiaonan to explore the characteristics of geographical distribution and type composition of cultural representations. Theoretically, it enriches the domestic research system on cultural representation in English textbooks; practically, it provides targeted references for optimizing textbook compilation and implementing intercultural teaching.

2. Literature Review

Scholars such as Cheng point out that textbooks can be understood in broad and narrow senses[2]. The broad sense includes all teaching materials inside and outside the classroom, while the narrow sense refers specifically to the textbook. The new curriculum standards further clarifies the diverse forms of English textbooks. This study defines "cultural representation" as the depiction of cultural elements in textbooks, focusing on two core dimensions: geography and type[3].

Research on cultural representation in English textbooks has formed a multi-dimensional landscape internationally. International studies have focused on textbooks in countries such as Japan and Turkey, exploring issues like the imbalance between native and target language cultures and the emphasis on big C versus small C culture[4,5]. Domestic research has recently shifted from college English textbooks to primary and secondary school textbooks, often using the analytical framework of Zhang Hong and Li Xiaonan and employing content analysis to examine cultural geographical distribution and

type composition. These studies have found problems such as an insufficient proportion of international culture and monotonous representation forms[6,7]. Huang, using the same analytical framework to analyze the PEP junior high school English textbooks, also found that cultural products accounted for the highest proportion, while cultural communities and cultural figures were largely absent, indicating that this phenomenon is prevalent across different grade levels and textbook editions[8]. Furthermore, Shui found in his study on the PEP high school English textbooks that the distribution of various categories of Chinese culture is uneven, with very little content related to spiritual culture (such as values and moral cultivation), and that explicit representation is mainly achieved through pictures and introductions rather than through core texts[9]. Fan similarly pointed out in her study on college English textbooks that Western culture accounts for over 85%, while Chinese culture accounts for less than 15%, presenting an imbalanced pattern of “strong West, weak China”[10]. Ji, employing Risager's five-dimensional analytical framework, found that the new FLTRP junior high school textbooks have begun to incorporate more native culture content and present it in more diverse ways[11]. Although existing research has established a mature analytical system, a dedicated systematic study on the cultural representation in the 2019 FLTRP High School English compulsory textbooks still needs to be deepened, which is the core focus of this study.

3. Theoretical Basis

This study takes the “Analytical Framework for Cultural Representation in English Textbooks” developed by Zhang and Li [3] as its core theoretical foundation. This framework

Table 1. Analytical Framework for Cultural Representation Content in English Textbooks

Geography	Native Culture	Target Language Country Culture	International Culture	Common Culture	
Type	Cultural Products	Cultural Practices	Cultural Perspectives	Cultural Communities	Cultural Figures

4. Research Design

This chapter describes the research design, including research questions, research objects, research methods, and data collection and analysis.

4.1 Research Questions

Based on the above framework, this study

innovatively constructs a two-dimensional system of “representation content” and “representation mode (Table 1).” This study focuses on the “representation content” dimension, effectively addressing the fragmentation and quantitative ambiguity of traditional single-dimension analyses.

Its geographical dimension comprises four categories: native culture (Chinese culture), target language country culture (cultures of English-speaking countries such as the UK and USA), international culture (cultures of non-English speaking countries), and common culture (intercultural common elements without significant regional differences). The type dimension encompasses five categories: cultural products (material products like clothing, literary works), cultural practices (behavioral patterns like festivals and customs), cultural perspectives (values and beliefs), cultural figures (well-known figures from cultural groups), and cultural communities (specific cultural groups at the national/ethnic level)[12].

This framework aligns highly with the research objectives: the four-fold geographical classification meets the multicultural requirements of the new curriculum standards, allowing for a comprehensive examination of cultural geographical balance in textbooks; the five-fold type classification considers both material and spiritual culture, enabling systematic analysis of the depth of cultural representation. Furthermore, this framework has been widely applied in research on multilingual textbooks, and its scientificity and applicability have been empirically verified. Adopting this framework ensures the rigor of the research process and the credibility of the results, laying a solid foundation for optimizing the study of cultural representation in textbooks.

analyzes the FLTRP high school English compulsory textbooks. The core research questions are:

- (1) What cultures of which regions or countries are represented in the high school English textbooks?
- (2) What are the characteristics of the types of cultural representation in the high school English textbooks?

4.2 Research Objects

This study focuses on the 2019 FLTRP High School English compulsory textbooks (three volumes in total), edited by Chen Lin and published by Foreign Language Teaching and

Research Press. Each volume contains 6 units, totaling 18 units. The five core sections of each unit, namely [Starting out], [Understanding ideas], [Developing ideas], [Presenting ideas], and [Project], are selected as the scope of analysis (Table 2).

Table 2. Detailed Information of Textbooks

Textbook Name	Editor	Publisher	Edition	Range of study
FLTRP High School English Compulsory Textbooks	Chen Lin	Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press	March 2019	volumes 1 to 3

4.3 Research Method

This study employs content analysis, a research tool for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of communication content. Based on the analytical framework of Zhang Hong and Li Xiaonan, coding analysis is conducted from the “representation content” dimension: cultural representation content is classified by geography and type, results are presented through statistical analysis and charts, and the characteristics of cultural representation content in the textbooks are systematically interpreted.

This study examines cultural representation in the FLTRP High School English compulsory textbooks from two dimensions: “Classification of cultural representation content by geography” and “Classification of cultural representation content by type.”

(1) Classification of cultural representation content by geography

Based on the framework by Zhang Hong and Li Xiaonan, this study classifies the sections and units involving cultural representation in the FLTRP High School English compulsory textbooks according to four cultural types: native culture, target language country culture, international culture, and common culture. Table 3 shows the distribution of each section across units:

4.4 Cultural Representation Content in FLTRP High School English Textbooks

Table 3. Cultural Representation by Geography

Section Unit	Starting out	Understanding ideas	Developing ideas	Presenting ideas	Project
B1 U6	International Culture	Native Culture	Target language country culture	Common Culture	Native Culture
B2 U1	Common Culture	Native Culture	Target language country culture	Native Culture	Native Culture
B2 U2	International Culture	Target language country culture	Native Culture	Common Culture	Common Culture
B2 U4	Common Culture	Native Culture	Common Culture	Common Culture	Common Culture
B2 U5	Common Culture	Target language country culture	Target language country culture	Native Culture	Common Culture
B3 U3	Common Culture	Target language country culture	Target language country culture	Common Culture	Native Culture
B3 U4	Common Culture	International Culture	Native Culture	Native Culture	Common Culture
B3 U5	International Culture	Native Culture	International Culture	Common Culture	Common Culture

Based on coding the geographical attributes of the five major sections according to the framework, the results (Figure 1 and Figure 2) show: common culture has the highest proportion (38%, 12 texts), followed by native culture (30%, 11 texts), target language country culture (19%, 7 texts), and international culture

(13%, 4 texts) has a relatively lower proportion. This distribution indicates that the textbooks emphasize understanding intercultural commonalities and transmitting local culture, while also incorporating target language country culture and international culture. From a textbook progression perspective, Volume 1

initially covers all four cultural types, Volume 2 strengthens the presentation of common culture, and Volume 3 further expands the dimension of international culture, reflecting a pedagogical design logic moving from basic cognition to in-depth expansion.

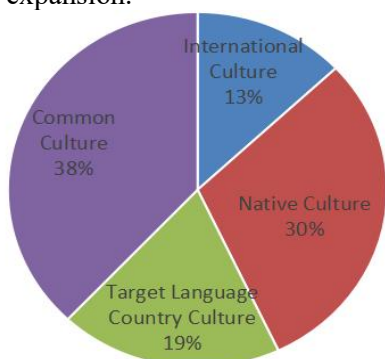


Figure 1. Cultural Representation by Geography

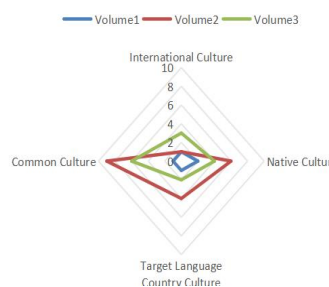


Figure 2. Cultural Distribution by Geography
(2) Classification of cultural representation content by type

Following the analytical framework of Zhang Hong and Li Xiaonan, this study classifies the units containing cultural elements in the FLTRP High School English compulsory textbooks into five categories: cultural products, cultural practices, cultural perspectives, cultural communities, and cultural figures, conducting coding accordingly (Table 4).

Table 4. Representation by Type

Section Unit	Starting out	Understanding ideas	Developing ideas	Presenting ideas	Project
B1 U6	Cultural Products	Cultural Products	Cultural Products	Cultural Products	Cultural Products
B2 U1	Cultural Products	Cultural Practices	Cultural Practices	Cultural Practices	Cultural Practices
B2 U2	Cultural Products	Cultural Practices	Cultural Practices	Cultural Practices	Cultural Practices
B2 U4	Cultural Products	Cultural Products	Cultural Products	Cultural Products	Cultural Products
B2 U5	Cultural Practices	Cultural Practices	Cultural Practices	Cultural Products	Cultural Products
B3 U3	Cultural Products	Cultural Figures	Cultural Figures	Cultural Products	Cultural Products
B3 U4	Cultural Figures	Cultural Figures	Cultural Figures	Cultural Figures	Cultural Products
B3 U5	Cultural Figures	Cultural Figures	Cultural Perspectives	Cultural Products	Cultural Products

Statistical analysis of cultural types (Figure 3, Figure 4) reveals: The textbooks primarily use “cultural products” as the main representation type (48%, 19 texts), followed by cultural practices (30%, 12 texts) and cultural figures (20%, 8 texts). Cultural perspectives account for a very low proportion (2%, 1 text), and no content related to cultural communities is present. Regarding progression, Volume 1 presents only cultural products, Volume 2 focuses on cultural practices and cultural products, and Volume 3 expands to cultural figures and cultural perspectives. This forms a logical progression from material culture to behavioral and spiritual culture, aligning with the cognitive development patterns of high

school students. However, the absence of cultural communities indicates that the typological completeness of cultural representation needs improvement.

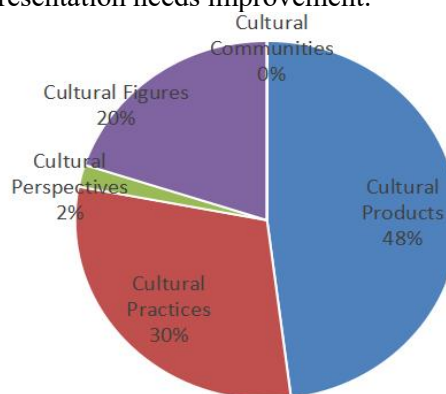


Figure 3. Cultural Content by Type

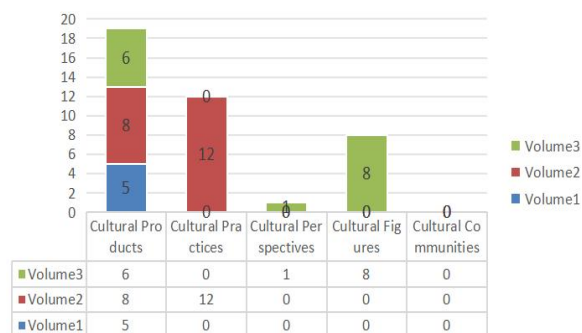


Figure 4. Distribution by Type in Textbooks

5. Conclusion

Based on the “Analytical Framework for Cultural Representation in English Textbooks” by Zhang Hong and Li Xiaonan, this study employed content analysis to systematically investigate the characteristics of cultural representation content in the three compulsory volumes of the 2019 FLTRP High School English edition. The conclusions are as follows: Regarding geographical distribution, common culture (38%) and native culture (30%) are dominant, target language country culture (19%) accounts for a moderate proportion, and international culture (13%) has a relatively low proportion. The textbooks show a characteristic of “emphasizing commonalities and local culture,” with a gradient design progressing from basic cognition to in-depth expansion across volumes. Regarding type composition, cultural products (48%) are the primary form of representation, followed by cultural practices (30%) and cultural figures (20%). Cultural perspectives have a very low proportion (2%), and content on cultural communities is absent, forming a progression from material to spiritual culture, although the coverage of types is not comprehensive.

Based on the findings, to align with the multicultural education goals of the new curriculum standards, the following implications and suggestions are proposed: Textbook writers should optimize the geographical distribution of cultures, adding materials from non-English-speaking countries such as those in Asia and Africa, supplement content on cultural communities, and improve the completeness of cultural type coverage. English teachers should strengthen comparative intercultural teaching, utilize multimedia resources to expand cultural content beyond the textbooks, and design targeted teaching activities addressing weak areas such as cultural perspectives and cultural

communities to guide students towards a deeper understanding of similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures. Future research could expand the scope to include elective textbooks or conduct comparative analyses of different textbook editions, providing more comprehensive empirical support for optimizing cultural representation in English textbooks and helping students develop intercultural competence that integrates Chinese identity with an international perspective.

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