

An Analysis of the Representation of Chinese Cultural Practices in PEP Senior High School English Textbooks

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of deepening global cultural interaction, English education is tasked with spreading fine traditional Chinese culture. The General High School English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition, Revised 2020) clearly states that English textbooks should guide students to “tell Chinese stories well in English”. It also aims to develop students’ ability to express Chinese culture and their cross-cultural communication competence. However, existing studies mostly focus on static cultural typology. They largely ignore the dynamic, generative and situational nature of culture as “social practice”. Based on the six-dimensional classification system of Chinese culture, this study adopts a systematic content analysis method. It examines the representation of cultural practices in the 2019 People’s Education Press (PEP) Senior High School English Textbooks (compulsory and selective compulsory). The study finds that the textbooks cover cultural practice themes such as traditional festivals, skill inheritance and modern technology. These contents are presented through multimodal means including cultural texts, pictures and activities, with an emphasis on integrating tradition and modernity. Yet the textbooks have problems such as unbalanced theme coverage and insufficient systematic knowledge. Accordingly, this study puts forward targeted improvement suggestions from two aspects: textbook compilation and teaching practice. The suggestions aim to enhance students’ in-depth understanding and value recognition of Chinese culture, and effectively improve their cultural confidence and cross-cultural communication competence.

Keywords: Senior High School English Textbooks; Chinese Culture; Chinese Cultural Practices; Cultural Representation

1. Introduction

In an era of deepening global cultural exchanges, how to cultivate and develop students' cross-cultural abilities to understand and appreciate the world's diverse cultures from the perspective of Chinese culture and tell Chinese stories well in English has become the cultural mission that English textbooks in the new era should undertake [1]. The General High School English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition, Revised 2020) (hereinafter referred to as the New Curriculum Standards) lists “cultural communication competence” as part of the core competencies of English. It emphasizes that textbooks should “guide students to strengthen cultural confidence and tell Chinese stories well in English”. As a key carrier for fostering virtue through education and an important medium for moral education, English textbooks play an irreplaceable role in cultivating values. Thus, the function of foreign language textbooks has gone beyond mere language teaching. It has extended to guiding cultural values and shaping correct outlooks. Shen Qi argues that foreign language textbooks should include a considerable proportion of local Chinese culture [2]. This helps cultivate students’ national cognition, national awareness and a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation.

The 2019 PEP Senior High School English Textbooks (hereinafter referred to as the Senior High School English Textbooks) contain rich elements of Chinese culture. They serve as a vital resource for fostering high school students’ awareness of Chinese culture. Nevertheless, current studies on Chinese culture in these textbooks mostly focus on static content classification (e.g., the material/spiritual dichotomy). They neglect the study of cultural practices as dynamic behavioral carriers. Cultural practices reflect the production and lifestyle of the Chinese nation. They are the core focus of the New Curriculum Standards’ goal of

fostering virtue through education. Therefore, this study aims to conduct a comprehensive and systematic analysis of Chinese cultural practices in the PEP Senior High School English Textbooks. It examines their multimodal representation features and puts forward corresponding teaching suggestions. Based on the six-category system of Chinese culture proposed by previous studies, this study focuses on the subclass of “cultural practices” [3]. It uses content analysis to explore the content and modes of cultural practice representation in the 2019 PEP textbooks (compulsory and selective compulsory modules). The goal is to promote students’ understanding and recognition of Chinese culture, and cultivate their cultural confidence and cross-cultural communication competence.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Chinese Cultural Practices

Chinese culture is also known as “China’s culture”. Many scholars define Chinese culture based on the general concept of “culture”. Li Zonggui analyzed Chinese culture from multiple dimensions. He pointed out that Chinese culture has distinct national characteristics and serves as the cultural foundation of the Chinese nation [4]. The speech at the National Conference on Ethnic Unity and Progress summarized Chinese culture which is noted that “our splendid culture is created by all ethnic groups together, and Chinese culture is an integration of the cultures of all ethnic groups”.

The term “cultural practice” derives from Patrick R. Moran’s five-element theory of culture, namely the “5P” model [5]. This model includes cultural persons, cultural communities, cultural practices, cultural perspectives and cultural products. Based on this theory and Guo Baoxian’s research, Chinese culture is divided into six categories: Chinese cultural products, Chinese cultural practices, Chinese cultural perspectives, Chinese cultural communities, Chinese cultural persons and Chinese cultural information [6]. Among them, Chinese cultural practices are defined as “the long-standing productive and living lifestyles formed by the Chinese nation through long-term creative practices”. Examples include traditional festivals, cultural customs, dietary habits, reform and opening-up, scientific and technological innovation, disaster relief, and major-country

diplomacy [7].

Clearly, Chinese cultural practices are dynamic concepts with rich connotations and clear boundaries. They cover the behavioral patterns and collective activities of the Chinese nation in history and contemporary society. Their essence lies in creative social actions. Specifically, they include traditional practices such as Spring Festival Eve staying-up, tea ceremony and agricultural cooperation. They also cover modern social acts reflecting the spirit of the times, such as the aerospace program in scientific and technological innovation, the Belt and Road Initiative in policy actions, and the national fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. This concept must be strictly distinguished from static cultural products and abstract cultural perspectives. For instance, “family members making dumplings” in textbooks is a cultural practice because it involves collaborative behavior. Dumplings themselves are cultural products, and “reunion” is the cultural perspective they carry. The core boundary is that cultural practices reflect human initiative and social interaction.

2.2 Studies on Chinese Culture in Senior High School English Textbooks

This study retrieved literature from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). The search terms were “Senior High School English Textbooks” OR “Senior High School English Coursebooks” AND “Chinese Culture” OR “Local Culture” OR “Mother Tongue Culture” in the title. By the end of June 2025, 76 documents were retrieved. These include 73 Chinese documents (14 academic journals, 44 academic papers, 10 special journals and 4 conference papers) and 3 foreign documents (all academic journals). According to their research focuses, the studies are divided into five categories.

The first category is research on cultural element types, with 32 studies. Such studies focus on analyzing the specific carriers and classification of cultural elements in textbooks. For symbolic cultural elements, research centers on culture-loaded words, keywords and metaphors. For example, some studies reveal the connotations of Chinese culture by analyzing the representation of culture-loaded words in textbooks. Research on physical cultural elements covers character images, life phenomena and traditional skills. Among them, 58 studies focus on life

phenomena, exploring the lifestyle and customs of Chinese people reflected in textbooks. Research on activity-based cultural elements centers on local cultural activities and festival customs. However, these studies have achieved fruitful results in identifying and classifying cultural elements. They still lack in-depth exploration of intangible cultural fields such as philosophical thoughts.

The second category is research on cultural values, with 15 studies. Its core is to explore the deep values and ideologies conveyed by cultural content in textbooks. In terms of educational function, studies analyze how textbooks cultivate students' correct values through cultural elements. They do this from the perspectives of value guidance and meaning construction in the attitude system. Research on identity shaping focuses on national identity and cultural confidence cultivation. It aims to explore how textbooks enhance students' national pride and sense of cultural belonging. However, some studies point out the absence of values, such as "cultural aphasia". On the whole, such studies mostly stay at the level of whether textbooks convey values. They lack empirical research on how values are internalized into students' identity.

The third category is research on cultural communication modes, with 14 studies. It mainly focuses on the presentation carriers of cultural content and cross-language expression strategies. Research on multimodal representation explores graphic metaphors and multimodal stylistics. It analyzes how textbooks convey cultural information through multiple symbolic resources. Research on narrative strategies takes "telling Chinese stories in English" as a perspective. Taking Yilin Edition textbooks as an example, it studies how to present Chinese cultural elements through narration. Research on language transformation focuses on the translation of culture-loaded words. However, while emphasizing multimodal carriers, such studies pay little attention to the cultivation paths of students' cross-cultural expression ability.

The fourth category is cross-cultural comparison research, with 12 studies. It mainly examines differences in cultural content across versions or countries. In cross-country comparison, it compares cultural allocation in Chinese and Japanese textbooks. It analyzes the characteristics and differences of local culture

integration in textbooks of different countries. Cross-version comparison mainly focuses on old and new PEP editions, and Chinese and foreign editions such as PEP and Oxford editions. However, existing studies have gaps in cross-cultural comparisons with non-Asian countries.

The fifth category is research on cultural teaching transformation, with 11 studies. It focuses on the transformation mechanism from textbook content to classroom practice. Research on teaching strategies explores the integration paths of cultural elements and secondary development of textbooks. It aims to improve classroom teaching effects. Research on current situation reflection focuses on teaching attitudes and learning effects. Nevertheless, there is a disconnect between strategy design and classroom practice. Strategies to improve teachers' cultural teaching competence need to be improved urgently.

3. Research Design

3.1 Research Questions

This paper examines the content and modes of Chinese cultural practice representation in PEP Senior High School English Textbooks. It answers three research questions:

- (1) What are the main themes of Chinese cultural practices represented in PEP Senior High School English Textbooks?
- (2) How are these cultural practice themes presented in the textbooks?
- (3) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the representation of Chinese cultural practices in the textbooks? How can it be optimized to better promote students' understanding and communication of Chinese culture?

3.2 Textbook Selection

This study focuses on the 2019 PEP Senior High School English Textbooks. The textbooks mainly consist of unit sections and Workbooks. There are three compulsory volumes and four selective compulsory volumes. Each volume has five units (Compulsory 1 has six units with an additional Welcome Unit). Each unit has a specific theme. The main unit sections and Workbook sections are divided into the following parts (Table 1). This study counts and analyzes materials in all sections of each unit in compulsory and selective compulsory textbooks, including articles in the Workbook.

Table 1. Textbook Sections

	Sections Name	Core Function
Main Unit Sections	Theme Page	Guides students to understand the core unit theme through thematic images and inspiring introductions
	Listening and Speaking	Trains students to obtain information through listening input and express orally
	Discovering Useful Structures	Focuses on learning language structures and their application in reading practice
	Listening and Talking	Emphasizes oral output competence supported by listening input
	Reading for Writing	Drives writing output through reading text input and trains writing skills
	Assessing Your Progress	Tests comprehensive language application and mastery of language knowledge for unit summary and learning reflection
	Video Time	Expands and deepens unit themes through videos and cultivates students' visual literacy in line with the New Curriculum Standards
Workbook Sections	Using Words and Expressions	Trains vocabulary comprehension and application
	Using Structures	Strengthens the practical application of language structures (grammar/sentence patterns)
	Reading and Writing	Develops comprehensive reading and writing skills through extended reading and writing tasks
	Expanding Your World	Broadens cultural horizons and builds interdisciplinary connections

3.3 Research Method

This study adopts the content analysis method. Content analysis is a research method that conducts objective and systematic quantitative analysis of educational document content. It makes factual judgments on relevant educational phenomena. The textbooks selected are the 2019 latest PEP Senior High School Compulsory and Selective Compulsory English Textbooks, totaling seven volumes. Taking sections as analysis units, this study collects and records texts, pictures, audios and videos related to Chinese cultural practices in the main text and exercises of the textbooks for further analysis.

4. Research Findings

4.1 Represented Content

The content of Chinese cultural practices represented in PEP Senior High School English Textbooks is shown in Table 2.

Overall, the representation of Chinese cultural practices in the textbooks shows diverse themes and dynamic forms. From the seven compulsory and selective compulsory volumes, the content covers four major fields: traditional festivals and customs, skill inheritance, community activities and modern technological applications. It constructs a complete cultural behavior spectrum from cognition to action. First, the textbook design integrates traditional roots and modern innovation. By selecting practical cases with historical inheritance and contemporary vitality,

the textbooks strengthen cultural continuity and highlight the contemporary value enabled by technology. For example, Compulsory 1 Unit 4 takes "disaster relief" as the theme. It introduces that Chinese rescue teams have received relevant training and carried out many domestic and international rescue missions. This helps students understand China's contributions in international rescue and feel the professionalism and humanitarian spirit of Chinese rescue teams. In addition, Compulsory 2 Unit 5 takes "technical art" as the theme. It shows practices such as playing the guzheng and pipa, and enjoying traditional Chinese music. This allows students to appreciate the charm of traditional Chinese art and inspire their love for traditional culture.

Second, the textbooks emphasize the integration of culture and practice. They help students understand cultural connotations through practice. Compulsory 3 Unit 1 focuses on "traditional festivals". It covers rich cultural practices such as celebrating the Lantern Festival, the Zhuang Ethnic Group's Folk Song Festival, the Inner Mongolia Nadam Fair, the Spring Festival and making Laba porridge. Through these contents, students not only learn the customs of traditional Chinese festivals. They also feel the profound cultural heritage behind the festivals and their important role in uniting national emotions and inheriting cultural traditions.

In addition, the textbooks stimulate students' innovative thinking and patriotic feelings

through themes such as scientific and technological innovation. Selective Compulsory 1 Unit 5 and Selective Compulsory 3 Unit 1 introduce hybrid rice technology, chemical agricultural technology, peanut planting technology and ink-wash animation respectively. These contents show China's innovative achievements in agricultural technology and cultural art. They help students realize the infinite charm of the integration of technology and culture, and enhance their national pride.

In summary, PEP Senior High School English Textbooks perform well in representing Chinese cultural practices. Through multi-field and multi-angle representation, the textbooks open a window for students to fully understand Chinese culture. While learning English, students can deeply understand Chinese culture and strengthen cultural confidence. This lays a solid foundation for inheriting and promoting fine traditional Chinese culture.

Table 2. Representation of Chinese Cultural Practices in PEP Senior High School English Textbooks

Textbook	Unit/Section	Theme of Cultural Practices	Specific Practice Description
Compulsory 1	WorbookU4/Expanding Your World	Disaster Relief	Chinese rescue teams have received relevant training and carried out many domestic and international rescue missions
Compulsory 2	Unit5/Listening and Speaking	Technical Art	Playing the guzheng and pipa; enjoying traditional Chinese music
Compulsory 3	Unit1/Listening and Speaking, Reading and Thinking, Video Time	Traditional Festivals	Celebrating the Lantern Festival, the Zhuang Ethnic Group's Folk Song Festival, the Inner Mongolia Nadam Fair, the Spring Festival; making Laba porridge
	Unit3/Listening and Speaking	Cultural Customs	Visiting ethnic minority areas and experiencing local customs
	Unit4/Listening and Speaking	Scientific and Technological Innovation	China's aerospace technology
	Worbook/Reading and Writing	Traditional Festivals	Preparations before the Spring Festival; Spring Festival customs
Selective Compulsory 1	Unit5/Reading and Thinking	Technical Art	Hybrid rice technology; chemical agricultural technology; peanut planting technology
Selective Compulsory 2	Unit3/Reading and Thinking	Dietary Habits	Food and customs in different regions of China
Selective Compulsory 3	Unit1/Using Language	Technical Art	Ink-wash animation

4.2 Modes of Representation

Based on the analytical framework for cultural representation in English textbooks proposed by Zhang Hong and Li Xiaonan (Table 3), there are five main modes of representation [8]. These are cultural texts, cultural knowledge sections,

pictures/introductions, background cultural information, and activities/exercises. Each mode is refined into different carriers. Texts include listening texts, video texts and reading texts. Activities and exercises include cultural expression, cultural comprehension and language practice.

Table 3. Analytical Framework for Cultural Representation in English Textbooks

Mode	Description
Cultural Texts	Texts themed on one or more cultural contents in the input and exercise sections
Cultural Knowledge Sections	Sections introducing one or more cultural contents in the input section
Pictures/ Introductions	Pictures and introductions reflecting cultural contents in the input and exercise sections
Background Cultural Information	Background knowledge in the input and exercise sections to help understand other contents in the cultural texts, pictures, introductions or explicit sections (including

	names of people and places)
Activities/Exercises	Activities and exercises themselves, including cultural comprehension, cultural expression, and language learning activities/exercises containing cultural contents

5. Main Text

In previous studies, the proportion of cultural representation is calculated mainly by frequency and percentage [9]. Since the same cultural practice is presented in various forms in the textbooks, this study uses frequency for statistics. The frequency of representation modes of Chinese cultural practices in the new PEP Senior High School English Textbooks is shown in Figure 1.

Almost all introductions to cultural practices in the textbooks are accompanied by pictures. This design is ingenious and effective. Pictures help students intuitively recognize and understand these Chinese cultural practices. They also greatly improve students' learning interest [10]. Chang Wenzhe and Zhang Hong confirmed this point. Taking foreign language edition textbooks as examples, they explored how to use textbook pictures for cultural teaching. By analyzing the relationship between pictures and texts, the study found that directly presenting thematic pictures is particularly eye-catching. Pictures restore practical details through concrete scenes. They effectively make up for the abstract limitations of behavioral culture in text descriptions. This makes it easier for students to develop emotional resonance and identity. This visual cognitive method makes learning interesting. It also provides rich visual information for students. Students can build an intuitive understanding of Chinese cultural practices, laying a foundation for cultural expression in cross-cultural communication.

In addition, the frequency of activities/exercises and cultural texts in the textbooks is similar. This design shows that the textbook compilation attaches importance to the close integration of theory and practice. It reveals the internal logic

of the cognition-action closed loop in textbook design. Cultural texts provide students with comprehensive and systematic cultural knowledge. Activities and exercises offer opportunities for students to apply this knowledge to real situations. Such a design provides rich contexts for students. It helps them deeply understand Chinese cultural practices and improves their cultural application and communication competence. Students can confidently express and convey Chinese culture in real communication.

Although knowledge sections and background information appear less frequently in the textbooks, they play an indispensable role in providing basic knowledge points. Knowledge sections offer basic cultural knowledge points for students. They help students build an initial understanding of Chinese culture. Background information provides a broader perspective for students and stimulates their interest in cultural learning. These representation modes are not as intuitive and attractive as pictures. However, they play an important role in cultivating students' cultural cognitive competence. They provide a solid theoretical foundation for students to deeply understand Chinese culture and help improve their understanding and recognition of Chinese culture.

In summary, Chinese cultural practices in PEP Senior High School English Textbooks are represented through an organic combination of various modes. This meets students' needs for knowledge mastery and improves their understanding and practical ability of cultural practices. It reflects the comprehensiveness and systematicness of textbook design. It helps students better understand and inherit Chinese culture in the learning process.

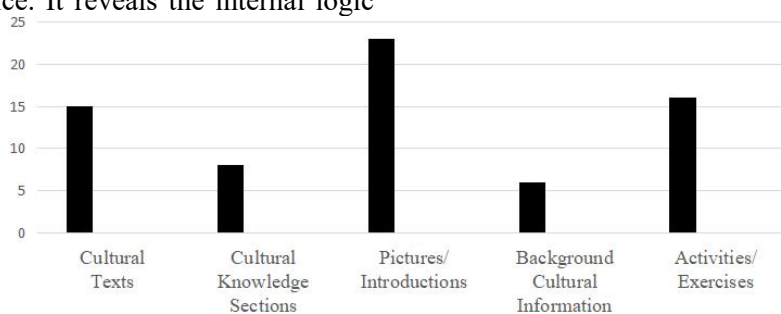


Figure 1. Frequency of Representation Modes of Chinese Cultural Practices in PEP Senior High School English Textbooks

5. Discussion and Suggestions

5.1 Deficiencies

First, in terms of the content of Chinese cultural practice representation, the textbooks cover rich and diverse elements of Chinese culture to a certain extent. The themes include disaster relief, technical art, traditional festivals, cultural customs, scientific and technological innovation, and dietary habits. These themes include both traditional elements of Chinese culture and modern scientific and technological achievements. They reflect the inheritance, innovation and development of Chinese culture. However, further analysis of the represented content reveals some problems. In terms of balanced coverage of cultural types, some themes such as disaster relief and traditional festivals appear frequently in the textbooks. In contrast, themes such as scientific and technological innovation and dietary habits are less represented. For example, the disaster relief theme occupies an important position in Workbook Unit 4 of Compulsory 1. The scientific and technological innovation theme is only mentioned in Unit 4 of Compulsory 3. Such unbalanced representation may lead students to gain in-depth knowledge of some cultural themes. They may lack understanding of other equally important themes.

Second, regarding the modes of cultural practice representation, cultural texts and pictures are frequently used in the textbooks (23 times and 15 times respectively). Knowledge sections and background information are used less frequently (8 times and 6 times respectively). This shows that the textbooks prefer to attract students' attention and convey cultural information through complete text narratives and intuitive pictures. This method effectively improves students' learning interest. However, it may be insufficient in the systematicness and in-depth exploration of cultural knowledge. The low use of knowledge sections and background information may lead to incomplete understanding of cultural background knowledge. Students may fail to form a systematic cognitive framework of culture.

5.2 Teaching Suggestions

Based on the above findings, the following optimization suggestions are put forward:

5.2.1 Optimization of Textbook Compilation

(1)Balance cultural selection. Textbook compilation teams should further balance the representation frequency of different cultural themes. On the basis of retaining existing popular cultural themes, increase the coverage of themes such as scientific and technological innovation and dietary habits. For example, in scientific and technological innovation, add introductions to China's latest achievements in 5G technology and artificial intelligence. This shows the modern vitality of Chinese culture. In dietary habits, elaborate on the production techniques and cultural connotations of featured food in different regions of China. This enhances students' understanding of the diversity of Chinese culture.

(2)Enrich representation modes. Increase the proportion of knowledge sections and background information on the basis of existing modes. Set up special cultural knowledge sections for cultural themes in each unit. Systematically introduce relevant cultural background knowledge such as historical origin and regional distribution. Add background information before text reading and oral practice. This helps students better understand cultural details in the texts and build a complete cultural cognitive system.

(3)Strengthen in-depth cultural exploration. Focus on in-depth exploration of culture in the compilation of cultural texts and pictures. Do not limit to superficial descriptions of cultural phenomena. Explore the values and social significance behind culture. For example, when introducing traditional festivals, not only tell festival customs but also discuss their impact on family values and social harmony. Guide students to think about cultural connotations and cultivate critical cultural thinking.

5.2.2 Improvement of Teaching Practice

(1)Expand teaching resources. Teachers should not be limited to textbook content in teaching. They should actively expand teaching resources. For cultural themes less represented in textbooks such as scientific and technological innovation, introduce popular science articles and news reports as supplementary reading materials. For dietary habits, organize students to watch food documentaries and carry out food culture research projects. This enriches students' cognition of different cultural themes. (2)Design diversified teaching activities. Design diversified teaching activities according to the characteristics of cultural representation modes

in the textbooks. For cultural texts, carry out role-playing and debate activities. This helps students deeply understand cultural conflicts and integration in the texts. For pictures, guide students to practice picture description and creative writing. This stimulates students' imagination and creativity. Make full use of knowledge sections and background information. Design cultural knowledge competitions and cultural theme speeches. This strengthens students' memory and application of cultural knowledge.

(3) Cultivate cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication competence. Focus on cultivating students' pride in Chinese culture and cross-cultural communication competence in teaching. Compare cultural differences between China and the West on the same themes such as traditional festivals and dietary habits. Guide students to analyze the reasons behind cultural differences and understand cultural diversity. This improves students' communication and exchange competence in cross-cultural contexts.

6. Conclusion

This study systematically analyzes the representation characteristics of Chinese cultural practices in PEP Senior High School English Textbooks. It confirms the advantages of the textbooks in thematic diversity and multimodal design. It also points out the deficiencies in balanced cultural theme coverage and in-depth knowledge exploration. Future research can further focus on cross-cultural comparison of cultural practices. It can also carry out teaching experiments based on the suggestions of this study to verify the practical effects of optimization strategies. In the context of the intertwining of globalization and localization, foreign language textbooks are important carriers of cultural communication. They need to continuously explore how to more effectively activate the educational value of Chinese cultural practices. This helps students become active disseminators of Chinese culture in cross-cultural communication.

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