

Original Article

A Study on Chinese Cultural Elements in Junior English Textbooks: Taking the People's Education Press as an Example

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Abstract - With the advancement of the times, cultivating cross-cultural understanding and communication skills has become increasingly important. Cultural awareness is listed as one of the core competencies in the English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 edition). Textbooks are teaching materials developed based on curriculum standards and systematically reflect subject content. They can help students acquire systematic knowledge, master the content teachers teach, and promote improving students' learning. The writing of Chinese culture in English textbooks directly affects teachers' teaching, the improvement of students' cross-cultural communication abilities, and the formation of their personalities. The presentation and richness of its cultural content will also profoundly affect the cultivation of students' cross-cultural awareness. This article delves into the widely used Junior English textbooks by People's Education Press, systematically analyzes the Chinese cultural content, and understands the presentation of Chinese cultural content in the textbooks. By summarizing the advantages and disadvantages of the textbook in Chinese cultural writing, the author will provide relevant suggestions for teachers to effectively utilize the textbook from four aspects: ideology, skills, classroom teaching, and extracurricular activities.

Keywords - People's education press, Textbooks, Chinese culture, Junior english.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Purpose

Language and culture complement each other and are inseparable. Language is not only the carrier and manifestation of culture but also a component of culture, and culture restricts the form of language and becomes the cultural connotation of language. It can be seen that learning a language requires understanding culture, and textbooks are tools that carry language and culture. Cheng (2011) proposed that textbooks can be divided into broad and narrow senses in concept. In a broad sense, textbooks refer to all teaching materials, including textbooks, exercise books, CDs, newspapers, and other teaching materials. Narrowly speaking, textbooks refer specifically to textbooks, which are the core teaching materials of the curriculum, namely the textbooks used in teaching. Textbooks are the basic carrier of English teaching and an important basis for teachers to design their teaching (Sheldon, 1988). The Chinese culture in textbooks directly affects teachers' teaching, improving students' cross-cultural communication abilities and forming their personalities.

This study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the People's Education Press Junior English textbooks to understand the distribution characteristics and presentation methods of Chinese culture in the textbooks. This helps

teachers use textbooks more effectively, thereby improving students' multicultural awareness and cross-cultural communication skills.

1.2. Research Significance

In terms of theoretical significance, there is relatively little research on the current Junior English textbooks by People's Education Press, and research in this field needs to be further enriched and improved. Studying the cultural factors of Chinese culture in Junior English textbooks can help broaden the theoretical perspective of studying the cultural content of the textbooks, provide theoretical references for teachers' teaching and textbook improvement, and provide a basis for the development and reform of the English curriculum system.

In terms of practical significance, this research facilitates to guide teaching practice. Studying Chinese culture in the Junior English textbook can change teachers' thinking and teaching concepts, helping them transform and update their English teaching ideas and methods. Secondly, this helps to provide feedback and suggestions for the writing of textbooks (Jin, 2013). Through this study, it can provide certain theoretical references and references for English textbook editors regarding the writing of Chinese culture in English textbooks.



2. Literature Review

2.1. Textbook

Fan (1987) has pointed out that modern teaching materials are understood in a broad sense and mainly consist of written and audio-visual materials. Sheldon (1988) argues that textbooks are the basic carrier of English teaching and an important basis for teachers to design their teaching. He believed that textbooks were the main materials for students to learn and were the visible heart of English teaching.

Zhong (2003) has proposed the view that textbooks are seen as a “teaching medium” between students and teachers and narrowly understood textbooks as books that students need to learn knowledge in a certain field. Tomlson (2011) believed that any material that can help students improve their existing knowledge, abilities, and experiences in a planned and purposeful manner could be called a textbook.

Cheng & Sun (2011) have maintained that textbooks can be divided into broad and narrow senses. The broad sense of textbooks refers to all teaching materials, while the narrow sense of textbooks specifically refers to the textbooks themselves.

2.2. Culture

Stern (1996) divided culture into broad and narrow concepts based on its structure and category: broad culture and narrow culture. Hu (1999) argued that culture can be divided into three types, namely elegant culture, popular culture, and deep culture. Elegant culture mainly refers to various arts, psychology, religion, literature, music, etc. Popular culture mainly refers to behaviors, customs, and habits related to people’s daily lives. The final deep culture involves people’s behavioral norms, religious traditions, values, moral standards, and other ways of life.

Culture can be divided into broad and narrow senses. In a broad sense, culture is the sum of all material and spiritual wealth of mankind, including Material culture, institutional culture and psychological culture. Narrowly defined culture refers to social ideology and organizational structure (Ministry of Education of PRC, 2022).

3. Analysis of Chinese Culture in Junior English Textbooks by People’s Education Press

3.1. Distribution Characteristics of Chinese Culture in Textbooks

3.1.1. Theme Distribution

At present, the Junior English textbooks by People’s Education Press are mainly used as the world’s most widely used Junior English textbooks. The entire book consists of 64 units, of which Chinese culture has appeared 32 times. Therefore, the total amount of Chinese cultural content in the People’s Education Press Junior English textbook is still considerable.

Byram (1993) proposed his own classification framework in the evaluation model of cultural content in textbooks, which includes eight themes-social identity and social groups, beliefs and behavior, social interaction, socialization and life circle, society and political system, cultural orientation and national identity, national history and geography.

The New Curriculum Standards categorize context categories into three categories: human and self, human and society, and human and nature. Among them, human and self involve 9 sub-themes under the two theme groups of "life and learning" and "being a person and doing things". People and society involve 15 sub-themes under the four theme groups of "social service and interpersonal communication", "literature, art and sports", "history, society and culture", and "science and technology". Human and nature involve five sub-themes under the four theme groups of "natural ecology", "environmental protection", "disaster prevention", and "universe exploration" (Ministry of Education, 2022).

The first is the analysis of the “man and self” theme. Through the analysis of textbooks, it was found that there is less thematic alignment between people and self-categories in Chinese culture and culture, with only one aspect being club culture. It can be seen that there is relatively little content on the theme of people and self in Chinese culture in Junior English textbooks.

Next is the analysis of the theme of “man and society”. There are a total of 23 topics in the textbook of the People’s Education Press, with the content accounting for the largest proportion among the three topics. In terms of this theme, the "History, Society, and Culture" theme group accounts for the largest proportion. Among them, there is a greater focus on the sub-theme of "Cultural customs and landscapes, holidays and celebrations in major countries worldwide". It includes Chinese traditional festivals such as Dragon Boat Festival, Spring Festival, Lantern Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, etc. It also introduces Chinese traditional cultural elements such as Paper Cuttings, Kongming Lantern, etc.

With regard to the theme group of "social service and Interpersonal communication", the PEP Junior English textbook includes volunteer culture, team culture and other topics. In the theme group "Literature, Art, and Sports" involves topics such as Chinese folk music and basketball culture. The theme group of "Science and Technology" includes the power of robots and Chinese manufacturing (Liu, 2011).

The last section is about the theme of “man and nature”. There are a total of 8 themes in the People’s Education Press, which are relatively rich in content and mainly focus on the theme group of "natural ecology". There are 7 natural ecological themes, such as love and

respect for nature, geographical location of major countries in the world, ecological characteristics and Natural landscape in different regions, etc. The sub-theme of space exploration includes one, while the two sub-themes of environmental protection and disaster prevention have not yet been addressed.

In summary, the textbooks contain rich Chinese culture and meet the abilities and interests of students, providing a good reference for teachers' cultural teaching. However, the distribution of Chinese cultural themes in textbooks is not uniform, with some themes having an excessive proportion while others have a low or even no proportion. Therefore, balancing the number of various themes is one direction of the reform of Junior English textbooks by People's Education Press.

3.1.2. *The Distribution of Chinese Culture in Each Volume*

From an overall quantity perspective, the presentation of Chinese culture in textbooks shows a trend of increasing, which is in line with the cognitive development characteristics of students. The organization of course content should follow students' psychological development level and cognitive tendencies. The compilation of cultural content should follow the principle of gradual progress, presenting cultural content from shallow to deep, from easy to difficult, based on students' cognitive level, acceptance ability, and comprehension ability.

3.2. *The Presentation of Chinese Culture in Textbooks*

The selection and presentation of cultural content cannot exist independently of each other. The presentation of Chinese culture is diverse and has a certain degree of flexibility. The textbook mainly presents Chinese culture through the following presentation methods: vocabulary, sentences, chapters, exercises, and discussions. Sentences refer to cultural content presented in the form of sentences. The text refers to the cultural content presented in the form of reading text, including short passages in the reading and role-play sections of each unit. The exercises include various types of questions, such as listening, reading, etc. Discussion is beneficial for stimulating students' interest in learning and enhancing their active output ability. The diversity of presentation methods also poses certain challenges and requirements for teachers' cultural teaching. Teachers can appropriately expand the Chinese culture presented in vocabulary and sentences in textbooks. This is beneficial for students to deepen their understanding of cultural knowledge and exercise their ability to express Chinese culture.

Among these five presentation methods, discussion and discourse can effectively promote students' understanding of Chinese culture, while vocabulary, sentences, and practice are not conducive to students' in-depth understanding of culture. However, the presentation of Chinese culture in Junior English textbooks mainly focuses on the following three aspects, resulting in

students' understanding of cultural knowledge remaining at the surface level and their ability to express themselves cannot be effectively improved (Sun, 2006).

Therefore, in the actual teaching process, teachers can moderately set up activities such as discussions, presentations, or speeches to improve students' ability to express Chinese culture.

4. Research Results

4.1 *Advantages*

Firstly, the selection of Chinese cultural content in the Junior English textbook by People's Education Press is rich in themes. The theme of cultural content in the textbook involves historical geography, literature and art, including China's major historical events, places of interest, and China's literary works, artistic creation, etc. In terms of communicative culture, the textbook introduces traditional Chinese festivals, various customs and habits, etc.

Secondly, the distribution of Chinese culture conforms to the cognitive development characteristics of students. As grades increase, the distribution of Chinese culture in various textbooks shows an increasing trend, which is in line with the cognitive development characteristics of students (Niu, 2002). The textbook includes five presentation methods, which enhance students' interest in learning Chinese culture to some extent.

Once again, excellent traditional Chinese culture should be integrated into value education. The excellent traditional culture of China is the most core value and emotional belonging widely recognized by the Chinese nation. The Chinese culture in the textbook emphasizes the introduction of excellent traditional Chinese culture, such as traditional Chinese festivals, art, and culinary culture. The textbook also emphasizes the traditional virtues of the Chinese nation, which have a subtle and positive impact on students in terms of ideology and behavior.

In short, the distribution of Chinese cultural content in the textbooks is reasonable and diverse, considering both society and individuals, providing choices and laying the foundation for the independent development of each student.

4.2 *Disadvantages*

Through text analysis, it was found that although the setting of Chinese cultural content in the Junior English textbook basically meets the requirements of the curriculum standards, the cultural content in the textbook has the advantages of rich selection and diverse presentation methods. However, there are still some unreasonable aspects in the setting of Chinese culture in Junior English textbooks, mainly manifested in the following aspects.

Firstly, there is an uneven distribution of Chinese cultural themes in Junior English textbooks. Some themes have strong repetition in selecting materials for Chinese culture, while others have little or no repetition (Cong, 2000). This indicates the limitations of the breadth of cultural content selection. For example, the main focus is on the "natural ecology" theme group under the theme of humans and nature. At the same time, the sub-theme of universe exploration only includes one aspect, and the two sub-themes of environmental protection and disaster prevention are not even involved.

Secondly, the Chinese cultural content in Junior English textbooks lacks a sense of the times (Zhang, 2005). With the advancement of the times and society, English textbooks should adapt to the development of the times and be updated in real-time. Junior English textbook has too many unit topic materials that are far away from students' lives and a bit far from their current lives. Textbooks should be closely related to teaching materials and topics in the daily life of teachers and students so that students and teachers can closely connect various cultural content with daily life and enhance students' interests. This approach is conducive to the cultivation of students' comprehensive abilities such as cross-cultural awareness and cross-cultural understanding (Zhu & He, 2005). The compilation of textbooks should consider the current development background of the times, adapt to the requirements of the times and the characteristics of students, and adapt to future development.

5. Suggestions

5.1. Suggestions for Teachers

Firstly, teachers should pay attention to the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures (Gao, 2017). There are few places in the Junior English textbooks of the People's Education Press where there is a comparison between Chinese and foreign cultures, and most of the cultures in these places are presented separately. Therefore, teachers should consciously compare Chinese and foreign cultures during teaching. For example, when it comes to texts with the topic of "Spring Festival", teachers can guide students to compare with Western Christmas. This can help students better understand the local culture, take its essence and discard its dross, thereby enhancing cultural self-confidence and national identity and improving cross-cultural communication ability.

Secondly, teachers should focus on guiding students' ways of thinking and values and cultivating their ability to express Chinese culture (Chen, 2001). Students from different cultural backgrounds have different ways of thinking. Teachers should cultivate students' divergent thinking, fully utilize current multimedia resources and other means to present the Chinese cultural content of textbooks, pay attention to the creation of real situations, mobilize students' multiple sensory participation, and

enable students to generate emotional resonance in the experience (Xu, 2013).

Thirdly, teachers must cultivate students' cultural confidence (Yuan, 2017). A significant internal reason for cultivating cultural confidence is having a sense of identity with one's country and nation. Cultural confidence will not come if one does not have a sense of identity with both. Therefore, teachers should guide students to understand the profound connotation of cultural confidence fully and deeply study China's excellent traditional culture, which is an important fundamental way for college students to enhance their cultural confidence. Teachers should also do a good job in classroom ideological and political work and cultivate students' cultural confidence at any time through the classroom.

Finally, teachers should attach importance to exploring Chinese cultural content in textbooks. When interpreting textbooks, they not only need to pay attention to the key and difficult points in language knowledge but also should consider the significance of Chinese culture contained in textbooks for students' knowledge learning and personality development, and do a good job in classroom ideological and political work.

5.2. Suggestions for Textbook Writers

Firstly, when it comes to cultural themes and content, both breadth and depth should be taken into account. To make students feel the diverse themes of Chinese culture, it is also necessary to ensure that the content of Chinese culture under each theme is diverse and rich.

Secondly, it is necessary to expand the coverage of traditional Chinese culture. As one of the four birthplaces of civilization, China has a civilization history of 5000 years (Zhang & Fang, 2003). The Chinese culture has a long and profound history. Nowadays, Chinese middle school students generally experience the phenomenon of "aphasia" in their mother tongue culture. Faced with their familiar local customs and cultures, they cannot express them in English or cannot express them effectively, which should be given more attention by textbook writers (Tang, 2010).

The compilation of textbooks should be in line with the development of the times. Faced with the trend of modernization, a series of achievements made by China after the reform and opening up should also be reflected in textbooks, which helps to strengthen students' sense of national pride and self-confidence (Liu, 2019).

Finally, it is necessary to expand relevant learning resources appropriately (Fang & Zhang, 2011). Textbook writers need to consciously add certain expanded knowledge after each Chinese cultural point to meet the diverse needs of different students.

6. Conclusion

In order to understand the design characteristics of Chinese cultural content in the current Junior English textbook, this study takes the People's Education Press Junior English textbook as the research object. It explores the textbook's theme distribution and presentation of Chinese cultural content. The major findings are as follows.

This research has found that the setting of Chinese culture in the People's Education Press Junior English textbooks basically meets the requirements of curriculum standards, and the cultural content in the textbooks has advantages such as rich selection and diverse presentation

methods. However, there are still some unreasonable aspects in the setting of Chinese culture in the People's Education Press Junior English textbooks. For example, the distribution of Chinese cultural themes in Junior English textbooks by People's Education Press is uneven (Gu, 2011). What is more, the selection of materials in Chinese culture is highly repetitive and not presented in-depth enough.

In short, the overall setting of Chinese culture in the Junior English textbooks of the People's Education Press is reasonable, but there are also some unreasonable aspects. To address these shortcomings, textbook writers and teachers must work together to improve them.

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