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Critical Analysis of Cultural Representations in Chinese College English Textbooks: Student Perceptions and Implications for Intercultural Communication

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Abstract: In the context of globalization, English education has become a crucial component of the internationalization of higher education in China. College English textbooks, serving as both academic resources and cultural carriers, reflect the political, social, and ideological contexts of society and often contain biases and stereotypes that influence students' perceptions of English-speaking cultures. This study aims to critically analyze the cultural representations in Chinese college English textbooks and explore students' perceptions of these representations. Employing a qualitative methodology, the research utilizes textbook content analysis and student interviews, emphasizing intracultural diversity and challenging stereotypical single perspectives. The findings reveal a tendency toward superficiality and homogenization in the portrayal of foreign cultures, as well as a somewhat monolithic representation of Chinese culture, resulting in "cultural aphasia" in students' cultural expressions. The study advocates for textbook development that pays greater attention to the complexity and diversity of cultures, promoting more equitable and in-depth intercultural understanding to enhance the quality and effectiveness of language education.

Keywords: globalization; English education; cultural representation; textbook analysis; intercultural communication; cultural diversity; cultural aphasia

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, English education has become a key focus globally. In China, the concept of internationalization in higher education is evolving, influencing college English teaching. Textbooks, as both academic resources and cultural artifacts, reflect the political, social, and ideological contexts of society. They often carry biases and stereotypes, making it crucial to examine their cultural representations. College English textbooks are often students' primary source of cultural knowledge about English-speaking countries, but these representations can sometimes be one-sided or stereotypical. This study aims to critically analyze cultural representations in college English textbooks and explore students' perceptions. It moves beyond intercultural diversity to emphasize intracultural diversity, challenging stereotypes and promoting a deeper understanding of cultural complexity. By combining textbook analysis with student interviews, the research identifies gaps between textbook content and student perceptions, offering insights for improving future textbooks.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Curriculum and Textbook Evaluation

A curriculum is a comprehensive plan for teaching and learning, involving planning, teaching, and assessment [1,2]. Curricula are shaped by ideologies, with hidden messages conveyed through the inclusion or exclusion of content. Textbook evaluation is critical in ensuring materials meet students' needs and foster cultural awareness. It can be categorized into random and systematic evaluations, assessing both intrinsic and extrinsic effectiveness [3]. Cunnings worth advocates for evaluating textbooks based on their alignment with course objectives, their effectiveness in developing language skills, and the cultural content they present [4]. Byram proposed categorizing cultural content in textbooks into eight areas, though this may oversimplify cultural complexity [5]. Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore the implicit ideologies and hidden curricula in textbooks, focusing on how they shape students' perceptions and career aspirations.

2.2. Cultural Representation in Language Teaching

Culture is often defined as the way of life of a particular group, encompassing customs, language, religion, and social norms [6,7]. Scholars debate the rigid and overgeneralized nature of cultural definitions, with culture viewed as complex and context-dependent [8,9]. Cortazzo and Jin categorize culture into source, target, and international cultures [10]. The 2020 College English Education Guidelines emphasize integrating core educational principles and traditional Chinese culture in textbooks, but risks oversimplifying Chinese culture, ignoring its diversity [11,12]. Simplification of "traditional culture" may lead to a homogenized perspective, overlooking the vast cultural and regional diversity within China.

This study aims to examine how cultural narratives in textbooks influence students' understanding of both foreign and domestic cultures, with a focus on avoiding stereotypical portrayals.

2.3. Intercultural Communication Competence

Interculturality, as a concept, has faced significant scrutiny from scholars in recent years. Some view it as a complex narrative composed of multiple imaginaries, which include the common perception of globalization, the misapplication of diversity, and challenges related to the origins of intercultural education. Additionally, interculturality often involves an overemphasis on cultural differences while ignoring parallels among cultures, as well as a local-centric obsession that hinders broader intercultural dialogue [13]. While interculturality is frequently treated as a normative term, it is not always clear-cut or universally advantageous. In exploring the possibilities of intercultural communication, Fox proposed a three-tier theory to examine whether authentic communication is possible between cultures with fundamentally different normative discourses [14]. Fox outlined three levels of communication: successful communication (level one), miscommunication (level two), and systematically distorted communication (level three). However, Fox argued that achieving successful communication at the first level, where participants engage in effective intercultural exchanges, is often unattainable. This assertion suggests that intercultural communication is inherently fraught with challenges, making genuine understanding difficult to achieve across diverse cultural contexts.

Byram's model of intercultural communication competence remains a cornerstone in discussions of this field [15]. It highlights the integral role of language acquisition in the communicative process and delineates the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions for successful intercultural interaction. Byram identifies several key components of intercultural competence, including *Savoir* (knowledge of self and others), *Savoir être* (attitudes of relativizing the self and valuing others), *Savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating), *Savoir apprendre/faire* (skills of discovering and interacting), and *Savoir s'engager* (political education and critical cultural awareness). The growing global focus

on intercultural communication is reflected in various international initiatives. In 2006, UNESCO published the *Guidelines on Intercultural Education*, outlining principles that encourage intercultural understanding. In 2018, the OECD's report, *Teaching for Global Competence in a Rapidly Changing World*, also highlighted the role of intercultural communication in preparing students for an interconnected global environment. These reports indicate a growing recognition of intercultural education's importance in today's increasingly globalized world.

2.4. The Role of Textbooks in Promoting Intercultural Communication Competence

Textbooks play a central role in shaping how intercultural communication competence is taught and understood. This research seeks to adopt a comprehensive approach by linking intercultural communication competence to global issues and the responsibilities of being a global citizen. one that focuses on language acquisition and proficiency, and the other that emphasizes cultural understanding, societal dynamics, global perspectives, and intercultural competence [16]. The study aims to investigate how textbooks, through the presentation of various cultural contents, impact students' attitudes toward intercultural understanding. By integrating global perspectives and fostering intercultural awareness, textbooks can contribute significantly to shaping students' ability to engage effectively in cross-cultural contexts.

2.5. Research on Culture in Language Teaching in China and Other Countries

The relationship between language teaching and cultural education has long been recognized as inseparable. Since the early twentieth century, the inclusion of cultural teaching in language education has been a subject of significant scholarly attention. Lado stressed the importance of culture in language teaching and proposed a framework for cultural construction [17]. By comparing behaviors across two cultures, language teachers can anticipate cultural challenges and raise students' awareness of their own cultural backgrounds. Similarly, Smith argued that the ultimate goal of English teaching should be to equip teachers with the ability to express their views on native cultures, rather than simply acquiring knowledge of foreign cultures or developing new cognitive patterns [18]. Kramsch further emphasized that intercultural communication involves participants from diverse cultural backgrounds and that one effective way to broaden students' understanding is through dialogue, reading, and writing that engage both native and target cultures [19]. Sandra reinforced the idea that culturally relevant topics should be integrated into language teaching, observing that foreign language teachers in Chile recognized the benefits of incorporating local culture into their teaching, leading to improved outcomes [20].

Kim pointed out that foreign language learners often seek not only to understand the culture of the target language but also to express their own cultural identities through it [21]. However, current foreign language teaching practices often constrain learners' ability to articulate their native cultural content, limiting their capacity for authentic intercultural exchange.

In China, research into intercultural communication competence has evolved, with an increasing emphasis on cultural teaching within foreign language education. Gao proposed the "1+1>2" model, which suggests that enhancing proficiency in both the target language and native language can be mutually beneficial [22]. Integrating Chinese culture into English teaching, according to this model, can improve students' English communication skills while also promoting Chinese cultural heritage. However, Li found that English education in China remains dominated by an exam-oriented approach, with teachers focusing on linguistic knowledge and neglecting cultural teaching. As a result, only the instrumental aspects of English education are emphasized [23]. In contrast, in the context of globalization, foreign language learning should not merely be a tool for acquiring foreign culture but also a means to enhance the international presence of Chinese culture [24].

These studies illustrate the increasing recognition of the importance of incorporating learners' own cultures into the curriculum. Researchers such as Cortazzi and Jin have highlighted the need to raise students' awareness of cultural diversity, allowing them to critically engage with differences and reflect on their own cultural backgrounds [25]. Such awareness is crucial for successful communication in a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected. However, a closer examination reveals that many studies focusing on cultural diversity often emphasize differences between cultures, while overlooking the equally significant diversity within cultures. Cultures are complex and multifaceted, containing various subcultures, regional differences, and evolving practices. Failing to acknowledge internal cultural diversity can hinder students from gaining a comprehensive understanding of cultural expressions and behaviors. This research, therefore, adopts a comprehensive and inclusive perspective, critically analyzing the issue of diversity and avoiding the reinforcement of cultural biases within the PPP model.

2.6. Decolonization of the Language Curriculum and Chinese Cultural Aphasia

Decolonization seeks to challenge the enduring effects of colonization and racialization, promoting alternative modes of knowledge that resist erasure. Language plays a central role in these dynamics, historically serving as a tool for dominance and cultural subjugation. In a globalized era, McCarthy warns against the tendency to portray third-world societies as inferior in educational curricula [26]. Subedi further notes the challenge of overcoming students' ethnocentrism, which views one's own culture as "natural" while others are considered "strange" [27].

In China, English education often reinforces Western cultural content while neglecting the expression of Chinese culture, linguistic and cultural displacement [28]. Despite strong proficiency in English, students may struggle to express their own cultural identity. Zhao traces this issue to the dominant influence of Western culture, creating a cultural hegemony in English education [29]. Zhang and Yang emphasize that current English curricula focus on language skills and foreign cultural education, neglecting the cultivation of Chinese cultural literacy [30]. Liu et al. argue that an excessive focus on avoiding negative transfer from Chinese to English diminishes students' connection to their own culture, contributing to this "aphasia" [31]. This situation reflects deeper power imbalances within language acquisition processes, akin to colonial cultural erasure.

2.7. Global Citizenship and the Chinese Curriculum

Global citizenship education aims to foster a sense of belonging to a global community, emphasizing interconnectedness across various spheres [32]. This aligns with the concept of a shared global future, which promotes solidarity and global cooperation. This concept transcends national boundaries and encourages a shared global identity. The rise of globalization and the global role of English as a lingua franca provide an opportunity to enhance international cooperation and mutual understanding.

In China, English education must evolve to nurture global citizenship skills alongside language proficiency. College English education should equip students with the knowledge and attitudes necessary to engage in a global community [33]. Analyzing textbooks reveals how these skills are embedded in the curriculum, uncovering implicit narratives that shape students' understanding of their global role. This examination can guide educators in refining curriculum design to promote a more inclusive, forward-looking global citizenship education, preparing students to contribute to a shared future for humanity.

3. Methodology

This study follows an interpretive paradigm, focusing on understanding individuals' perceptions of the world [34]. A qualitative research design [35] is used to explore the

cultural representations in college English textbooks and their impact on students' cultural perceptions. The research questions are:

1. How do the textbooks represent cultures other than Chinese?
2. How do the textbooks represent Chinese culture?
3. What is the student's perspective on the cultural representation in the textbooks?

Data will be collected from textbook analysis and student interviews. The textbooks, including unit texts and exercises, will be analyzed for language, discourse structures, and socio-political implications. Six students will participate in semi-structured interviews to provide insights into their views on cultural representation. Interviews will last 40-60 minutes, and participants' confidentiality will be ensured.

Thematic analysis will be applied to both textbooks and interview data. The coding process will focus on themes like cultural comprehension, stereotypes, diversity, global citizenship, Chinese philosophy, and the need for decolonization in education. These categories aim to deepen the understanding of cultural nuances and avoid essentialist representations.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study will maintain credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability [36]. Interviews will serve as external validation, and oversight from the academic supervisor will ensure objectivity and rigor. The study's transparency and detailed descriptions will allow for replication and adaptation in different contexts.

Ethical guidelines from the British Educational Research Association will be followed. Participants will be fully informed, and their rights, including confidentiality, will be prioritized. The research process will also support the researcher's well-being and professional growth, ensuring a balanced and reflective study.

4. Findings and Discussion of a Study on Culture in Chinese Textbooks

The present study focuses on the four volumes of An Integrated English Course, a widely adopted textbook series tailored for English majors. It is published by the Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press. Each unit in this textbook includes two texts and related exercises. The exercises associated with Text I consist of 11 parts, as follows: lead0in, pre-reading questions, text comprehension, structural analysis of the text, vocabulary, grammar, translation, exercises for integrated skills, oral activities, writing, and listening. Text II is the expansion of Text I, with only the exercises of questions for discussion. This study will use the method of content discourse analysis (in-text citation) to explore the ideology and power relations behind the teaching materials. The following section will focus on two questions: How do the textbooks represent cultures other than Chinese, and how do textbooks represent Chinese culture?

4.1. Cultural Representation Other than Chinese

4.1.1. Cultural Stereotypes and Homogeneous Foreign Culture

While the four volumes of textbooks aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of culture, it is important to acknowledge that they can still inadvertently perpetuate certain stereotypes when discussing culture. One notable example is the definition of the "American spirit" presented in unit 8 of the textbook AIEC 2 as "being young and free, optimistic and confident, informal and disrespectful" [37]. This fits the stereotype of the American youth, rebellious in their quest for freedom, unfettered. It can be argued that these adjectives alone do not sufficiently capture the complex and multifaceted nature of the American spirit, and relying solely on such limited descriptors can lead students to develop an incomplete and potentially misconstrued mindset.

Moreover, one text titled "The Unhappy America Way" in Unit 8 of AIEC3 presents a depiction where English-speaking people, despite generally enjoying good health and a comfortable income, tend to have a more somber outlook. However, it is crucial to recognize that this portrayal presents cultures in a stereotyped and fixed manner, inadvertently

erasing the diverse range of behaviors and attitudes that exist within any community. The passage suggests that individuals of non-English-speaking backgrounds are more likely to experience happiness. It illustrates this point by highlighting the demeanor of individuals from various cultural backgrounds:

A Frenchman while he is abusing the Government is as gay as a lark. So is an Italian while he is telling you how his neighbor has swindled him. Mexicans, when they are not actually starving or actually being murdered, sing and dance and enjoy sunshine and food and drink with a gusto which is a very rare north of the Mexican frontier [37].

The quoted passage from the textbook exemplifies a collection of stereotypes that depict individuals from different cultural backgrounds in a reductive and caricatured manner. By employing dialogism as an analytical lens, we can delve deeper into the underlying political origins and power relationships that perpetuate such stereotypes. The stereotypes presented in the text echo dominant narratives and ideologies that have shaped the portrayal of non-American cultures. The language in the passage reveals a skewed power relationship, where the dominant culture (American) assumes the role of the observer and judge of other cultures, imposing its own perspectives and values onto them. This power dynamic reinforces a sense of cultural hierarchy, with American culture being portrayed as the normative standard to which others are compared and judged.

This example can be considered as the process of "Othering", which refers to the utilization of stereotypes and representations about individuals from different cultures when encountering and discussing them in educational intercultural settings [8]. In the passage, "Othering" manifests in the way French, Italian, and Mexican cultures are presented in stark contrast to an implicitly superior American culture. The descriptions serve to establish a cultural hierarchy in which these cultures are relegated to the status of the exotic or aberrant "Other".

Cultural expression and emotional experiences are not confined to language or nationality. They have "echo" in various aspects, including personal background, individual disposition, social context, historical influences and politics. It is inaccurate and reductionist to attribute a particular emotional disposition solely to language or cultural background. A more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of cultural behaviors and emotional experiences can be achieved by embracing diversity, challenging stereotypes, and fostering inclusive dialogue.

4.1.2. Diversity in Products and Practices

According to Canale [12], cultural diversity ultimately comes down to comparisons between cultures based on her research. More specifically, the elements being compared are stereotypical products, practices, and persons (such as historical events, famous figures, and rituals) that implicitly draw on the PPP model. At first glance, the textbooks include cultures from different backgrounds, as evidenced in the following excerpts from the text "The Jeaning of America" in Unit 7 of AIEC2.

In the first category are considerations for the weak and respect for the aged. Among the ancient Egyptians, the young always stood in the presence of older people. In Tanzania, the young men bow as they pass the huts of elders. In England, until about a century ago, young children did not sit in their parents' presence without permission.

This is the story of a sturdy American symbol that has now spread throughout most of the world. The symbol is not the dollar. It is not even Coca-Cola. It is a simple pair of pants called blue jeans, and what the pants symbolize is what Alexis de Tocqueville called "a manly and legitimate passion for equality" [37].

Upon initial examination, the represented cultures exhibit diversity with content pertaining to various backgrounds such as America, Egypt, Tanzania, England, and so forth. However, the textbooks focus on surface-level aspects of different cultures, such as traditional clothing, food, or landmarks. These factors provide some understanding of cultural diversity, but they may overlook the complexities and nuances of cultures. the textbook's

comparisons often descend to the superficial level of mere products and practices. This tendency is clearly evident in the textbooks. Canale holds the view that cultural diversity is excluded when it comes to perspectives and ideologies [12]. As mentioned earlier, the spirit of American youth has been described as a rebellious pursuit of freedom, and Western countries are often associated with individualism. According to Xiong and Qian, it is expected that textbooks will prepare the student for the use of language in contexts, not in a vacuum [38]. It is crucial to encourage students to explore cultural diversity beyond the surface level and foster emotional connections that promote empathy, respect, and curiosity toward unfamiliar perspectives. In most contexts, culture is the collective way of life for an entire society, encompassing customs, dress, language, religion, ceremonies, social norms such as law and ethics, and belief systems [7]. It reflects the shared values and practices that shape a group's identity and worldview. This relatively superficial comparison may perpetuate stereotypes and reinforce cultural generalizations, rather than promote a genuine understanding of culture. According to Dervin, the concept of culture is not directly perceptible, but rather it is mediated by individuals who embody its imaginaries and representations [8]. Matsuo argues from a perspective of non-essentialism that cultural domains exist solely on their boundaries, with no inner territory. Cultural acts derive their significance and seriousness from this fact [39].

As Canale states, the discourse presented in textbooks incorporates foreign cultures in a manner that highlights the diversity and heterogeneity of various groups and their practices [12]. In this sense, diversity is often discussed *between* cultures, while diversity within a culture tends to be overlooked. Such an approach leads to simplistic comparisons between cultures, with a static view that ties culture to a specific geographical area. This trend is obvious in the researched textbooks. For example, British and American lifestyles are compared in one text, In England, the author can take a pleasant walk and enjoy the natural scenery, but when he comes to the United States, he has to use a car, otherwise, he can't get anywhere. Chinese gardens are often compared to their European counterparts, with Chinese garden characteristics being summarized as symmetry, harmony, and natural plants. However, such a statement is overly simplistic as there exist various factions of Chinese gardens, each possessing unique features. English as a lingua franca (ELF) teaching should facilitate learners' English communication in multicultural contexts, rather than imposing native-speaker norms. Instead of adhering to the norms and associated culture of native speakers, ELF teaching emphasizes cultural diversity [40]. This oversight can lead to a limited and oversimplified understanding of a culture's internal variations, subcultures, and regional differences, and may also affect intercultural communication. Recognizing and addressing intra-cultural diversity is essential for a comprehensive understanding of a culture's complexities.

4.1.3. Global Citizenship and Responsibility

Byram encourages learners to form the ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries. It is termed in English as *critical cultural awareness* and in French as *savoir s'engager* [5]. It is increasingly recognized that language learning extends beyond linguistic competence to encompass a broader understanding of global issues and the shared destiny of humanity (in-text citation). Consistent with this perspective, the examined textbook series articulates thoughtful considerations on various global issues, which is conducive to fostering students' global citizenship and responsibility.

The series delves into themes that are not only relevant to language learning but also crucial in fostering global citizenship and cultural consciousness. For instance, discussions on gender explore the social constructs and dynamics surrounding gender roles, stereotypes, and equality, allowing students to critically reflect on the diverse perspectives and experiences of individuals across cultures. Gender issues are discussed in the textbooks. In AIEC4, the last text titled *Why I Want a Wife*, the author who is a *wife* uses sarcasm in

the text to write that she wants a wife who can take care of the house, take care of the children, and socialize with friends. The textbook also touches upon the topic of racial discrimination. In AIEC4, there is an article alluding to the stereotype that Americans harbor prejudice against black individuals, commencing with the author's personal declaration as a member of the American black's community.

This is who I am not. I am not a crack addict. I am not a welfare mother. I am not illiterate. I am not a prostitute. I have never been in jail. My children are not in gangs. My husband doesn't beat me. My home is not a tenement. None of these things define who I am, nor do they describe the other black people I've known and worked with and loved and befriended over these forty years of my life [37].

The exploration of identity is a recurring theme in the textbooks, urging students to delve into the ways in which cultural, racial, ethnic, and national identities influence an individual's perceptions, values, and behaviors.

Unit 4 of the textbook, AIEC4, delves into the topic of expatriates and how they can maintain their cultural identity while residing in a foreign country [37]. The author describes his own feelings and confusion about how individuals can navigate the challenges of living in a different cultural context without losing touch with their own heritage and sense of self. In addition to the discussion on expatriates, another article in the same unit explores the author's experiences as a naturalized citizen. The term "naturalized citizen" refers to an individual who was originally born as an alien but has lawfully obtained citizenship in the United States in accordance with the Constitution and laws [37]. The author shares personal anecdotes and reflections, providing a firsthand account of the process and the impact it had on their sense of identity. Such content serves as a valuable resource for students as it sheds light on the challenges faced by individuals in maintaining their cultural identity amidst the complexities of living in a foreign country. It underscores the significance of understanding and embracing one's heritage, while also highlighting the transformative nature of the naturalization process and the ways in which it shapes an individual's identity within a new cultural and national context. By exploring these themes, students are encouraged to gain a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between identity, culture, and the experiences of individuals in diverse societies.

By addressing these themes within the language learning context, the textbook series aims to foster students' critical thinking, empathy, and cross-cultural understanding. It recognizes the significance of intercultural citizenship and global cultural consciousness as integral components of foreign language education, equipping students with the necessary skills and perspectives to navigate an increasingly interconnected and diverse world.

4.2. The Presentation of Chinese Culture in the Textbooks

4.2.1. Chinese Philosophy Presentation

According to the College Education Guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education, college English textbooks are mandated to incorporate socialist core values and traditional Chinese culture [11]. The textbooks under research have been thoughtfully designed to emphasize and integrate various aspects of Chinese culture throughout their content. One prominent occurrence of Chinese cultural elements is found within the Oral Activities volume, where students are encouraged to establish connections between the text they are studying and the rich cultural background of China. This approach provides students with an opportunity to deepen their understanding of Chinese culture and its significance in contemporary society. For instance, a specific task in the textbook AIEC2 requires students to share their insights on Confucius cultural programs and how they contribute to the promotion and dissemination of Chinese culture [37]. By engaging in discussions and activities related to these institutes, students can develop a greater appreciation for the

importance of cultural exchange and the role Confucius Institutes play in fostering international understanding. Moreover, the last two volumes of the AIEC (Advanced Intensive English Course) feature selected Chinese traditional quotes from Confucian or Taoist writings, although the quotes are presented in their original Chinese language [37]. These quotes serve as poignant reminders of the wisdom encapsulated in Confucian and Taoist philosophies, offering valuable insights into ethical principles and interpersonal relationships. For example, after the text "To Lie or Not to Lie" in Unit 6 of AIEC3, there are memorable quotes that reinforce the importance of self-awareness and integrity:

Confucius says, "You should be clear about what you really know, and what you don't know yet. That's sound knowledge and high intelligence".

One should honor his words when socializing with friends [37].

By incorporating these Chinese cultural references and quotes, the textbooks aim to deepen students' understanding of Chinese traditions, values, and philosophical concepts. They provide a platform for students to explore the cultural richness of China and encourage cross-cultural dialogue and appreciation. It is crucial to note that the inclusion of Chinese cultural elements in the textbooks aligns with the Ministry of Education's guidelines and reflects an effort to promote a deeper understanding and appreciation of China's cultural heritage among college students. By engaging with this cultural content, students are exposed to diverse perspectives and could develop a broader intercultural competence that extends beyond language proficiency.

4.2.2. A Homogeneous Chinese Culture

The researched textbooks not only delve into the rich tapestry of Chinese culture, but also showcase its magnificence through various facets such as awe-inspiring architecture, tantalizing cuisine, ancient poetry, and captivating history. Additionally, the textbooks draw insightful comparisons between the splendor of Chinese culture and that of European heritage, inviting students to appreciate the unique characteristics of each. However, it is important to critically examine these comparisons, as they can potentially contribute to a limited and one-sided view of culture, in line with Canale's assertion that pedagogical discourse often employs simplification strategies for didactic purposes [12]. While such strategies may effectively reduce information load, they can result in an incomplete portrayal of culture. It is crucial to recognize that culture is complex and multifaceted, and attempting to distill it into simple dichotomies may overlook its inherent diversity. For instance, in the textbooks, there is a comparison made regarding Chinese and Western perspectives on family. The text states:

In contrast to the emphasis on individualism in Western cultures, Chinese culture emphasizes the family ideal, where an individual is often regarded as an integral part of the family structure.

This sense of family consciousness and family honor is probably the only form of team spirit or group consciousness in Chinese life [37].

While this comparison attempts to highlight the importance of family and collective identity in Chinese culture, it runs the risk of oversimplification and perpetuating stereotypes. It presents a generalized viewpoint that Chinese individuals are more aware of family consciousness, while Western societies are associated with personal individualism. This perspective fails to acknowledge the inherent diversity within Chinese society, where attitudes and practices regarding family and individualism can vary significantly across regions, generations, and social contexts. To address this limitation, the textbooks should strive to present a more nuanced and balanced portrayal of Chinese culture. This can be achieved by incorporating a broader range of perspectives and exploring the complexities and variations within Chinese society.

n the researched textbooks, the textbooks place limited emphasis on the diversity within a culture. While there is one instance that briefly mentions the existence of different

types of cooking in various regions of China, such as Cantonese, Shanghai, Sichuan-Hunan, and Beijing cuisines, this representation only scratches the surface of the vast array of culinary diversity found within the country [37]. However, the current statement still only scratches the surface of the products. It would be more beneficial to include information about climate, history, or geography related to food in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding. For example, providing historical context would allow students to understand how regional cuisines have been shaped by centuries of cultural exchanges, migration, and trade. The textbooks could explore how the imperial court in Beijing influenced the development of refined and elaborate dishes, while also acknowledging the impact of nomadic traditions from the northern regions. They could highlight the historical significance of Cantonese cuisine, influenced by the vibrant trading culture of Guangzhou and the Pearl River Delta, as well as the fusion of local ingredients with foreign influences from Southeast Asia.

4.3. Students' Perspectives of the Cultural Representation in Textbooks

As previously mentioned, a comprehensive evaluation of a textbook entails both an internal assessment of its scientificity, rationality, and efficacy as an instructional material, as well as an external appraisal of its applicability to a specific target audience [3]. In line with this approach, the author of the study not only scrutinized the textbook itself but also sought to gather insights from the students who utilized it. To gain a deeper understanding of the students' perspectives on culture and any associated stereotypes, interviews were conducted with five participants who had experienced the textbook in their learning journey.

The interviews aimed to capture the students' reflections and experiences in relation to the cultural content presented in the textbook. Through open-ended questions and guided discussions, the author explored the students' perceptions of the cultural elements, the effectiveness of the textbook in conveying cultural knowledge, and any potential stereotypes or biases that they identified within the material.

By including the perspectives of the students, the evaluation process moved beyond a purely internal assessment to consider the impact of the textbook on its intended audience. The students' insights provided valuable feedback on the effectiveness of the textbook in promoting cultural understanding, improving intercultural communication, and challenging stereotypes.

4.3.1. Being Global and Concerned with Global Issues

During the interviews, students unanimously affirmed the crucial role of textbooks in shaping their global citizenship and fostering a sense of responsibility towards global issues. They expressed that the textbooks encompassed a wide range of topics related to global challenges, such as climate change, social alienation, the impact of the internet, immigrant identity, urbanization, gender equality, and much more.

For example, one student, Qian, recalled the beginning of the textbook where it discussed how future generations would perceive history and old stories. Qian found this perspective fascinating as it made them contemplate their own role and responsibility in shaping the future world. The text prompted them to think deeply about the actions and choices needed to create a better world for future generations. This exploration of a new perspective ignited a sense of purpose and awareness of the importance of individual contributions towards a more sustainable and equitable future.

Another student, Yinfeng, shared a deep impression from a specific unit in the textbook that focused on identity. The unit was particularly impactful as it highlighted the author's personal struggle with their own identity as a descendant of immigrants. Yinfeng recognized that such experiences are not isolated in today's globalized world, where individuals grapple with questions of belonging and cultural heritage. The inclusion of such personal narratives in the textbook resonated with Yinfeng and emphasized the relevance

of identity-related issues in fostering a sense of empathy and understanding towards diverse cultures and backgrounds.

I remember the start of the textbook; it talked about how kids in the future will think about history and old stories. It was pretty fascinating to me since this text is from another new perspective and makes me think what we should do, and what's our responsibility to make the future world better.

I do believe in the positive effect of textbooks on fostering global citizenship. There is one particular unit about identity that leaves me with a deep impression, where the author is the descendant of immigrants and he talked about his struggle about his own identity. Such examples are not isolated in today's globalized world.

These examples demonstrate how the textbooks effectively engage students in critical reflections on global issues and personal responsibility. By addressing themes related to global citizenship, identity, and social challenges, the textbooks broaden students' perspectives and nurture a sense of awareness and empathy towards the interconnectedness of the world.

The students' responses highlight the positive effect of the textbooks in fostering a sense of global citizenship and responsibility. By incorporating a diverse range of topics and personal narratives, the textbooks provide students with a deeper understanding of global challenges and encourage them to think critically about their roles as active global citizens. However, despite the unanimous agreement among students regarding the important role of textbooks in shaping global citizenship and responsibility, there may be some shortcomings and overlooked aspects. One possible area is the depth and comprehensiveness of coverage for certain global issues. While the textbooks cover many important global topics such as climate change, social alienation, immigrant identity, urbanization, and gender equality, the limited space and curriculum constraints may result in a lack of in-depth exploration of each issue.

4.3.2. Understanding of Culture

The interviewed students not only emphasized the potential narrowness of cultural representation in textbooks but also raised concerns about the association of culture with a specific nation, which can contribute to the formation of stereotypes. Drawing parallels to statistical concepts, one student stated as follow:

I believe cultural concepts in textbooks are sometimes oversimplified or generalized, possibly to simplify complex ideas or due to space and teaching constraints. In statistics, the characteristics of a population are not sufficient to describe the full nature of each individual in the population, and when the sample size is large enough, it is possible for the differences between two populations to be significant, even if very small.

This critique highlights how the oversimplification and generalization of cultural concepts in textbooks can lead to a shallow and essentialist understanding of culture. By reducing the complexities and nuances of cultures to a few generalized characteristics, textbooks risk perpetuating stereotypes and hindering students' ability to develop a comprehensive understanding of the diversity and intricacies of different cultures. On the other hand, another student, Yiyi, acknowledged the limitations of textbooks in their oversimplification and essentialist approach to culture. However, she also recognized their value in facilitating her understanding of culture.

Although textbooks are oversimplified and have an essentialist understanding of culture, they are also helpful for my understanding of culture. I have learned British architecture, painting, and sculpture in textbooks before, so when I go to the museum in UK, I can more appreciate the charm of its exhibits. In addition, I think that after understanding this relatively superficial knowledge, I may be more tolerant to different cultures.

Yiyi's perspective highlights the potential benefits of textbooks in providing students with initial exposure to cultural information. Despite their limitations, textbooks can serve

as a starting point for students to develop an interest in and basic understanding of various cultures. However, it is crucial to complement textbook learning with more in-depth and nuanced explorations of cultural diversity to avoid oversimplification and essentialism.

During the interview, one student expressed a different view regarding the essentialist presentation of culture. Pengyu believed that general English textbooks do not necessarily need to be fully inclusive and that it is acceptable to simplify cultural concepts for easier understanding. They argued that stereotypes can provide a quick way to understand certain concepts. According to Pengyu's view, the inclusion of stereotypes can serve as a starting point for students to grasp cultural differences and facilitate initial understanding.

I don't think general English textbooks need to be inclusive, it doesn't matter at all, and there can even be non-negative stereotypes because stereotypes are one of the quickest ways to understand a certain concept. If there is anything that can be improved, the existing texts mostly focus on the moral aspects of behavior, such as telling a truth by describing an event. I think we can add more content about national identity, cross-cultural communication, and the history and culture of different countries to make it more comprehensive.

In conclusion, while Pengyu expressed a view supporting the inclusion of non-negative stereotypes in general English textbooks for the purpose of quick comprehension, it is important to consider the potential limitations and consequences of relying solely on stereotypes. Striving for accuracy and inclusivity in cultural representation requires a balanced approach that incorporates deeper exploration and critical analysis of cultural complexities and individual variations. By incorporating diverse content and fostering intercultural understanding, general English textbooks can play a significant role in promoting cultural competence and effective communication in an increasingly interconnected world.

4.3.3. The phenomenon of Chinese cultural aphasia

As previously mentioned, Chinese cultural aphasia refers to the inability to articulate Chinese culture in any language other than one's native tongue [41]. Deepening the understanding of cultural aphasia in the context of English language learning brings to light significant power structures and ideological biases inherent in the education system. When interviewed, Pengyu highlighted this issue, pointing out an imbalance in cultural representation within English textbooks.

I appreciate the global perspective that these textbooks provide. It is an English textbook, so it's quite understandable that it primarily focuses on English-speaking cultures. However, the relative lack of Chinese content troubles me. As an English learner, I am submerged in different foreign cultures—learning about the British parliament, political systems, Shakespeare's poetry, and so on. Yet, when it comes to expressing our own culture, own political institutions, I often find myself at a loss. From my own understanding, a good English textbook should not merely serve as a window into foreign cultures. Instead, it should also be a mirror reflecting students' own culture and helping them articulate it in English.

Pengyu's comments indicate an unsettling disparity in the cross-cultural communication framework offered by English textbooks. While they sufficiently equip students with knowledge about foreign cultures, they fail to provide adequate tools for expressing indigenous cultural constructs, which can result in cultural aphasia. Chinese Cultural Aphasia reveals the implicit power hierarchies and cultural impositions embedded within the process of language acquisition. As Chinese students learn English, they encounter a language that is laden with cultural assumptions and values that are often significantly different from their own. This can lead to a marginalization of their native cultural expressions and identities, akin to the erasure and subjugation seen in colonial processes. In this

context, decolonization becomes a relevant and urgent lens to critically examine and challenge these issues in English language education in China, paving the way for more culturally respectful and equitable pedagogical practices. A balanced cultural representation would promote more equitable intercultural exchanges, fostering true global citizenship rather than perpetuating a hegemonic narrative.

Qian's views indeed resonate with Pengyu's observations regarding the representation of Chinese culture within the textbook. Both recognize the textbook's efforts to incorporate elements of Chinese culture and perceive these efforts as being minimal. Qian brings a unique perspective to this discussion by linking it to larger political initiatives and aspirations like China's Belt and Road project and the idea of a community with a shared future for mankind. These initiatives underscore China's growing global influence and highlight the importance of promoting a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Chinese culture globally. This viewpoint suggests that language education, and particularly the representation of one's own culture in language textbooks, can play a crucial role in these larger geopolitical and cultural discourses [38].

This textbook has tried its best to include Chinese culture, including Chinese famous sayings after class, and the introduction of Chinese food, architecture and other cultures in the text. But both in terms of length and form, our own content accounts for a very small proportion at a time when China is advancing major geopolitical initiatives like the Belt and Road and advocating the concept of a "community with a shared future for mankind", the ability to articulate the nuances of Chinese culture becomes particularly important. These initiatives indicate China's growing global influence and the increasing interconnectedness between China and the rest of the world.

By learning to articulate their own culture effectively in English, Chinese students can not only foster a stronger sense of their own cultural identity but also contribute to a broader global understanding of Chinese culture. This perspective is particularly relevant in a time when cross-cultural understanding and mutual respect have become crucial in our increasingly interconnected world. The representation of Chinese culture in English language textbooks thus becomes a significant factor in shaping these global cultural dialogues.

5. Conclusion

This research examines four English textbooks and interviews students, revealing how power structures shape cultural representations in language education. It highlights a limited, essentialist view of culture that reinforces stereotypes and homogenizes foreign cultures. While the textbooks incorporate elements of Chinese philosophy, they fail to fully capture the complexity of Chinese culture. Global themes promote students' awareness but may contribute to Chinese Cultural Aphasia, portraying third-world cultures negatively. By combining textbook analysis and student interviews, the study offers insights into biases and limitations in current educational materials. It calls for more nuanced, inclusive approaches to cultural content to improve language education and foster critical cultural understanding. This research also contributes to global discussions on cultural diversity, urging recognition of non-dominant cultures in the global discourse. However, the study has limitations, including a small sample size of student interviews and a narrow focus on textbooks, excluding broader classroom dynamics. These factors may affect the generalizability of the findings.

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