



## Cultural Representation in Primary School English Language Teaching Textbooks in Chinese Mainland

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### Abstract

This study aims to conduct a mixed-method analysis of *PEP Primary English*, a primary school English language teaching textbook series covering eight volumes widely used in Mainland China, to depict its representation of different cultures and explore whether the cultural representation follows the National English Language Curriculum Standard. Major results showed that considerable diversity was portrayed in the cultural representation of this textbook series whilst Chinese culture was appropriately represented in line with the values and ideologies embedded in Chinese society. The cultural content of this series generally accorded with the National Curriculum despite the provision of a few higher-level cultural topics. Three pedagogical suggestions were provided for future textbook adaptation and development, including a broader selection of cultural diversities and varieties of English, the use of implicit presentation and meaningful contexts for cultural content, and the implementation of ‘glocalisation’.

**Keywords:** Cultural representation, ELT textbooks, primary school teaching, education in China

### 1. Introduction

With the implementation of economic reforms and a new Open Door policy in China since the late 1970s, English has been promoted not only as a foreign language but also as an essential requirement for the majority of the population to advance their social, economic and professional mobility in the global market. English language instruction has taken precedence over other foreign languages by becoming a compulsory subject across all levels of China’s educational system. In 2001, the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China (MOE) launched a policy document entitled “Guidelines for Promoting English Language Instruction in Primary Schools” (MOE, 2001). This document focuses on a new approach to utilising English for effective interpersonal communication; it also mandates the introduction of English as a compulsory subject from Grade Three in primary schools. In 2003, MOE further announced a new ‘student-centred’ English language curriculum designed for primary and secondary

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schools nationwide (MOE, 2003). This change led to the most recent version of national English Language Curriculum Standard (MOE, 2011), implemented in 2011. The National Curriculum perceives English as a *lingua franca* for international communication; besides, it promotes cultural diversity and aims to embrace cross-cultural and cross-linguistic differences. One of the fundamental learning outcomes stipulated in the National Curriculum is to enable students to enhance their cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence, as well as to reconstruct their confidence in Chinese culture (MOE, 2011, p. 2).

Textbooks serve as the primary form of language input for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Mainland China. They are considered the main learning resource and vehicle for (a) delivering cultural content and (b) developing students' intercultural communicative competence. Thus, it is necessary to investigate the incorporation of culture in textbooks by analysing the texts that function as representational samples of language and culture. This study, therefore, employs a mixed-method analysis of a primary school English language teaching (ELT) textbook series covering eight volumes widely used in Mainland China, *PEP Primary English* (from Grade Three onwards), to examine the representation of different cultures in the textbooks and determine whether the cultural representation achieves consistency with the National Curriculum.

## 2. Culture in Second Language Teaching

Culture was not perceived as an integrated component of second and foreign language teaching until the 1960s and the 1970s when research carried out by sociolinguists and anthropologists into the relationship between language and culture progressed (e.g., Hymes, 1964, 1974, 1986; Geertz, 1973; Gumperz, 1972; Kaplan, 1966; Kramsch, 1993; Shweder, 1984). Compared to the traditional perception that culture was restricted to the high-end artifacts of a particular society, culture now is considered being mirrored in every part of daily communication both in oral and written forms, and thus language learners need to resort to the cultural principles that are underlined in the sorts of interactions in which they tend to engage (Crozet & Liddicoat, 1997). The shift of perspectives on the association between language and culture has greatly influenced the role of culture in second and foreign language instruction. The teaching of culture should not be postponed to the following stage after learners have achieved a certain level of language proficiency with respect to speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills (Liddicoat, Crozet, Jansen & Schmidt, 1997). It is necessary to integrate culture in the teaching of all language skills so that students can learn the culturally appropriate language behaviours.

According to Crozet and Liddicoat (1997), the fundamental goal of language teaching is always to enable students to develop their communicative competence. As coined by Hymes (1972), communicative competence refers to the ability to not only understand grammatical knowledge of the target language but also know how to use those rules appropriately in different contexts in order to achieve a successful communication. For intercultural contexts, a specific aspect of communicative competence, namely, intercultural communicative competence, is required for language learners to 'relate to otherness'. As Byram (1997, p. 71) defines, intercultural communicative competence is the ability to interact with members of the speech community from another country and culture in a foreign language. The principal aim of intercultural communicative competence is to improve learners' cultural awareness so that they can realise the differences between their first culture and other cultures which potentially cause failures of relating in communication. By means of such knowledge, learners are able to promote a positive attitude towards cultural diversities and facilitate an inclusive understanding of cultural conflicts (Sadeghi & Sepahi, 2018). One way to equip second and foreign language learners with such knowledge is to incorporate the elements of cultures in formal instructional materials including textbooks.

### 3. Established Studies on Cultural Content in ELT Textbooks

While it has been widely accepted that culture is an important dimension of language learning, there is no consensus as to what particular cultures should be included and how they should be represented in textbooks. Established studies on cultural content in textbooks have revealed two significant findings (e.g., Gulliver, 2010; Kim & Paek, 2015; Lee, 2009; Lee, 2014; Matsuda, 2002; Ndura, 2004; Song, 2013; Shin, Eslami, & Chen, 2011; Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2015). Firstly, there are consistent biases and stereotypes in ELT textbooks, which overwhelmingly feature certain cultural or ethnic groups. Secondly, there are clear social inequalities regarding the representation of gender, multiculturalism, individualism, materialism, and target country context.

For instance, Shin et al. (2011) and Matsuda (2002) found that inner circle cultures, such as those of the United Kingdom and the United States, were more favoured than outer circle cultures, such as India and Bangladesh, and expanding circle cultures like China, Japan, and Korea in ELT textbooks. Song (2013) argued that the revised Korean national English curriculum viewed English as a language of global and cosmopolitan citizenship and promoted cultural diversity; however, the current Korean ELT textbooks were limited to a cultural dominance of Anglo-Celtic, American male characters in these texts. Based upon comparison of international and localised English textbooks used in Iran, Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2015) found that most of cultural elements involved in the localised textbooks were culturally neutral in that they did not explicitly refer to any specific culture, while international textbooks highly valued target language cultural elements and the introduction of local and national culture was underrepresented. Ndura (2010) analysed six high-school English as a second language (ESL) textbooks used in the Western United States; and concluded that these textbooks exaggerated the image of America as a “problem-free” society and neglected the daily tensions and conflicts caused by intolerance, discrimination, and racism in the immigration nation. A similar finding regarding the lack of societal diversity was revealed in the work of Gulliver (2010), who investigated immigrants’ success stories in Canadian ESL textbooks.

Despite the increasing attention to foreign language textbooks, a majority of previous studies situated in China emphasized university-level English textbooks (e.g., Liu, 2013; Lu, 2013; Liu, Zhang, & May, 2015; Wu & Zhu, 2016; Wang & Xu, 2013; Xu, Zhu, & Yang, 2015; Zhu & Xu, 2014); however, studies of primary-school ELT textbooks are sparse. Within the existing studies, most investigated the grammar, vocabulary, or structure and layout of English textbooks (e.g., Chen & Yao, 2014; Wang & Jiang, 2015; Wang & Wu, 2008; Wang, 2016; Yang, 2014), but very few have explored the cultural content presented in Chinese ELT textbooks for primary education (e.g., Lee & Li, 2019; Liang, 2012; Zhang & Yang, 2003). By comparing cultural descriptions in two primary-school ELT textbooks published in Mainland China and Hong Kong, Lee and Li (2019) found that the mainland textbook focused on British culture but did not pay sufficient attention to other foreign cultures, whilst the Hong Kong textbook contained a wider range of foreign cultures. Liang (2012) carried out a quantitative analysis to examine the proportion of source culture, target culture, and international culture embodied in eight *PEP Primary English* textbooks. Among identified cultural content, the target culture and international culture dominated the textbooks by accounting for 87% in total, while source culture only made up 13%. Zhang and Yang (2003) looked into gender inequalities embedded in three ELT textbooks used in Chinese primary schools. Major findings showed that male characters were valued over female characters with regards to their roles in the family and in their professions.

To conclude, as far as the Chinese context is concerned, the previous textbook studies contributed to portraying biased cultural representation and demonstrated preferences for inner circles, target language cultures, and male characters in ELT textbooks. However, three issues remain to be resolved. Firstly, the majority have merely analysed several individual volumes rather than depicting the features of cultural representation throughout the whole textbook series. Secondly, except for Lee and Li (2019), pictures

have been excluded from most textbook analyses; instead, texts have been considered the sole carrier of cultural content. Thirdly, most have not provided an explicit classification of cultural themes particularly those in relation to target language cultures.

Therefore, the present study is necessary to address the abovementioned concerns. By combining both quantitative and qualitative methods, this study will provide a general understanding of the implicit construction of relationships between culture and language in Chinese ELT textbooks. It sets the research background against the backdrop of globalisation. Thus, its findings may contribute to future language policy planning and English curriculum reforms in China and other EFL countries as a reference to addressing conflicts between globalisation and nationalism.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1. *The textbooks*<sup>1</sup>

*PEP Primary English* (Wu, Swartz, & Levy, 2019) is one of the most widely used ELT coursebook series for primary education in Mainland China. It was co-compiled by the Curriculum and Teaching Materials Research Institute of the People's Education Press and Lingo Learning Inc. of Canada, following the 2011 version of the National Curriculum. Its recent edition was initially published by the People's Education Press in 2012.

The coursebook series consists of eight textbooks and corresponding supplementary materials such as activity books, wall charts, and audio-visual recordings. Each textbook is used for one semester throughout Grades 3 to 6. Every unit is composed of four parts, including Main Scene, Part A, Part B, and Part C. Main Scene introduces the learning objectives including the key sentences and words. Part A and Part B are obligatory for pupils to learn and produce after a lesson. Part C covers a range of optional items that are designed for providing a source of linguistic exposure to English for students.

### 4.2. *Research Methods*

The textbook analysis proceeds in three steps. The first step is to develop the criteria of categorising cultural elements presented in *PEP Primary English*. An adapted version of Kachru's (1985, 1992) three concentric circles of World Englishes is employed to define cultural categories. Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) review on the main textbook evaluation checklists for cultural content has revealed that, most of them were predicated on the notion that cultures reflected in English textbooks were categorised as *source cultures*, *target cultures*, and *international target cultures*. However, this categorisation appears to neglect the emerging fact that English has involved a wide range of functions and different degrees of penetration in various non-Western contexts (Kachru, 1986). Therefore, the stratification of English as proposed by Kachru (1985, 1992) is adopted in the present analysis in order to portray the representation of English and its varieties in a more specific manner. The cultural elements in the textbooks are generally grouped into two categories, namely, the local culture and the foreign culture. The local culture includes all the elements in relation to the home country where this textbook series has been published and widely used – China. The foreign culture is subcategorised into 1) the Inner Circle where English is applied as the mother tongue or a primary language due to its traditional historical and sociolinguistic bases over there, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand; 2) the Outer Circle where English is institutionalised as a *lingua franca* though it does not serve as the native language, such as India, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong SAR; and 3) the Expanding Circle where English is utilised as a primary foreign language but does not play a historical or governmental role, such as China, Japan, and South Korea.

<sup>1</sup> More details regarding this textbook series can be found in the author's PhD dissertation. Please refer to Tang (2016).

The second step is to tag those elements presented in the textbooks according to the established criteria of cultural categories; and to calculate their frequency in individual volumes and in the whole textbook series respectively. Here, there are four issues to be addressed. Firstly, the current analysis will investigate the visual content in *PEP Primary English* in addition to the text, since this series contains a large range of contextualized images to deliver and reinforce the use of the target language in a creative manner. For example, Unit 1 in Book 2 – ‘Welcome back to school!’ – involves the picture of the national flag of the United States, which needs to be labeled as an element of American culture. Secondly, proper nouns for particular persons, places, or things are noted and counted. Take *Wu Yifan* in Unit 1 of Book 2 for example. In 2011, the Department of Language Information Management of MOE issued a national standard entitled *The Chinese phonetic alphabet spelling rules for Chinese names*, which stipulated that *Pinyin*, the official romanisation system for Standard Chinese in Mainland China, was utilised to represent Mandarin Chinese pronunciation. The personal name of *Wu Yifan* appears to be written in Pinyin, which suggests that this name should be identified as a part of Chinese culture. Thirdly, the scope of the analysis does not cover all the images of characters due to that some of them merely portray partial characteristics of different ethnic groups without specifying the nationalities. Only those images which identify the nationalities of the characters are taken into account, such as a Japanese robot named as *Asako* who wears a traditional Japanese garment *kimono* depicted in Unit 6 of Book 6. Fourthly, those elements whose cultural origins are encountering considerable debates or whose traditions and customs are shared across a wide range of areas are classified as unidentified themes under the category of foreign culture. For instance, Christmas Day has been observed as a major festival and public holiday around the world, which does not involve a unique cultural origin and thus should be labeled as an unidentified theme in the present study.

The third step is to tabulate the frequency of cultural elements in the textbooks and to compare the features of their representation with the learning requirements for cultural awareness as stated in the National Curriculum.

Based on the abovementioned three procedures, the present analysis seeks to answer the following questions:

- RQ. 1. How many countries or regions are involved in the cultural content of the *PEP Primary English* textbook series?
- RQ. 2. To what extent is the local culture presented in the textbook series?
- RQ. 3. To what extent is the cultural content of the textbook series compatible with the requirements of the National Curriculum?

## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1. Overall Distribution of Cultural Elements in the Textbook Series

As Table 1 illustrates, *PEP Primary English* covered all the cultural categories and emphasised the diversity of cultural elements in general. There were 17 countries or regions involved in the cultural representation in this textbook series, including China, U.S.A., U.K., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Hong Kong SAR, Egypt, Brazil, Japan, South Korea, Spain, Italy, Germany, Russia, and France. Overall, this textbook series showed preference to the foreign culture over the local culture. There were 1574 elements related to the foreign culture, while 729 elements portrayed the local culture.

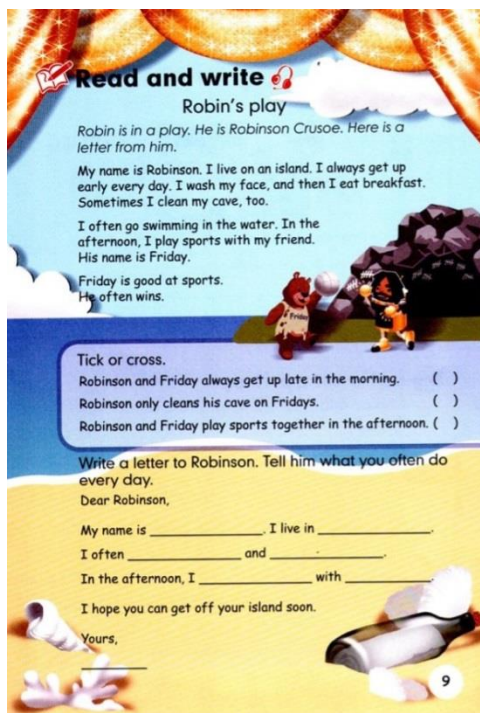


**Table 1.**

Overview of countries or regions presented in *PEP Primary English*.

Cultural category	Country/region	Frequency	
Local culture	China	729	
	Inner Circle	U.S.A.	121
		U.K.	154
		Canada	36
		Australia	74
		New Zealand	3
	Subtotal	388	
	Outer Circle	Singapore	5
		Hong Kong SAR	4
		Subtotal	9
	Expanding Circle	Egypt	2
Brazil		2	
Japan		14	
South Korea		5	
Spain		40	
Italy		21	
Germany		6	
Russia		5	
France		3	
Subtotal	98		
Foreign culture	Unidentified themes	1079	
<b>Total (foreign culture)</b>		<b>1574</b>	

With regards to the subcategories of cultural items, this textbook series paid more attention to the delivery of unidentified themes, Chinese culture, and the Inner Circle cultures over the Expanding Circle and the Outer Circle cultures. Within the Inner Circle, U.K. was mentioned most often, followed by U.S.A., Australia, and Canada; and New Zealand was depicted least often. Compared to the Expanding Circle which involved nine countries and 98 cultural elements, the Outer Circle cultures were underrepresented in the whole series. Only Singapore and Hong Kong SAR were provided with a highly limited frequency.



**Fig.1.** ‘Read and write’ in Unit 1, *PEP Primary English Book 6* (Wu et al., 2019, p. 9).

A closer investigation of the cultural content in *PEP Primary English* showed that this textbook series not only explicitly demonstrated the surface forms of culture such as national flags, country names, and remarkable foods, but also implicitly conveyed a range of cultural knowledge in relation to classic literature or mythology through dramas or stories. Take the section “Robin’s play” in Unit 1 of Book 6 for example (see Figure 1). The drawings and the text in this section both focused on a fictional character, Robinson Crusoe, who was the protagonist of the adventure novel *Robinson Crusoe* authored by Daniel Defoe. This English novel narrated the story of a castaway Robinson Crusoe who spends 28 years on a remote island while managing to survive through life-threatening situations. In the section “Robin’s play”, one of the main characters in the textbook series, the robot *Robin*, acted “Robinson Crusoe” in a play, writing a letter about the details of his life on the island. This plot appeared to illuminate British cultural characteristics embedded in Crusoe’s castaway story.

Another example regarding the implicit cultural representation in this textbook series is the dialogue “Let’s talk” in Unit 2 of Book 6. As shown in Example 1, the dialogue regarding the music “The Four Seasons” between the teacher *Mr. Jones* and the student *Mike* served as a warm-up of the art lesson that aimed to introduce how to draw four seasons of the year. *The Four Seasons* in fact is a group of four violin concerti by Italian composer Antonio Vivaldi, which was mentioned in this dialogue to implicitly present Italian culture.

#### Example 1.

*Mr. Jones:* Do you like the music, children?

*Mike:* Yes. It’s very beautiful. What is it?

*Mr. Jones:* *The Four Seasons*. Today we’ll draw the seasons. Which season do you like best, Mike?

### 5.2. The Presentation of the Local Culture in the Textbook Series

The distribution of cultural items in *PEP Primary English* reveals that the textbook writers have concentrated on the provision of Chinese culture both with respect to its total frequency in the whole series and its occurrences in individual books. As Figure 2 demonstrates, apart from unidentified themes accounting for nearly half, Chinese culture was mentioned most frequently, which occupied almost one-third of the cultural content in this textbook series. The Inner Circle cultures made up for 16.85%, and approximately two-fifths were the Expanding Circle cultural elements. The Outer Circle cultures occurred least often, taking up merely 0.39%.

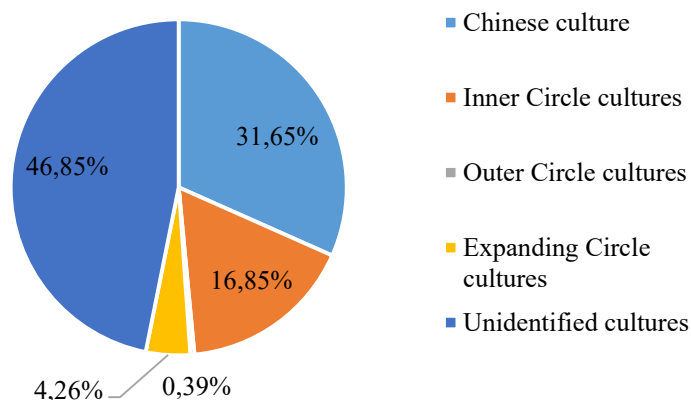
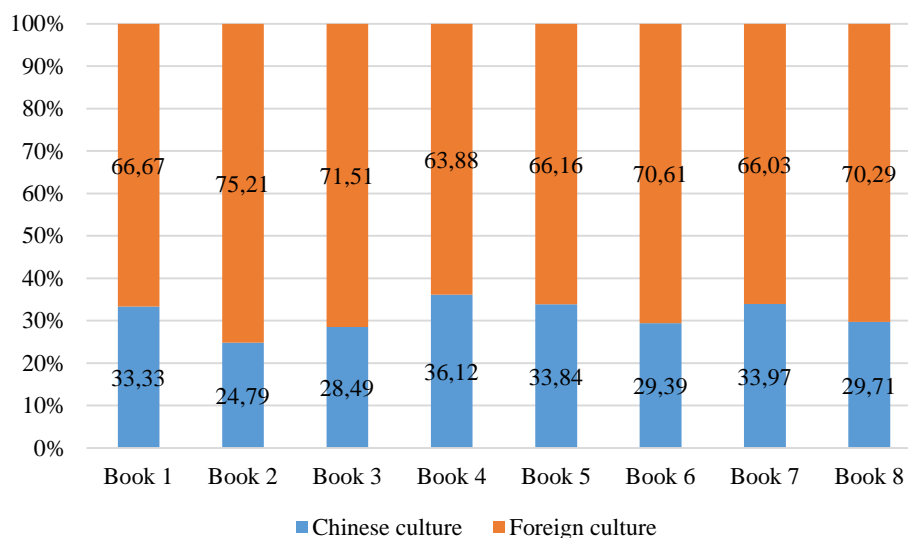


Fig. 2. Percentages of different cultures in *PEP Primary English*.

On average, Chinese culture accounted for at least a quarter of the cultural content in each volume of the textbook series. The ratio between Chinese culture and the foreign culture generally maintained in a consistent manner. As can be seen from Figure 3, compared to its occurrences in other volumes, Chinese culture was presented most often in Book 4, which made up for 36.12%. It was mentioned least frequently in Book 2, occupying 24.79%. Except for Book 2, Book 3, Book 6, and Book 8, Chinese cultural elements occupied more than one-third in each of other four volumes. This suggests that the textbook writers have considered the balanced presentation of Chinese culture in every single book of the series, which enables target students to progressively learn the related cultural knowledge and to immerse themselves in a sustainable cultural environment.



**Fig. 3.** The ratio between Chinese culture and foreign culture in each volume.

In addition, Chinese culture-related materials in the textbook series were not limited to the inclusion of traditional culture or symbolic themes such as panda, calligraphy, Chinese food, *kung fu* (Chinese martial arts), and Great Wall. Also, the textbook series introduced a range of cultural topics related to multiculturalism and the people's livelihood in modern Chinese society. For example, in Unit 3 of Book 8 – 'Where did you go?', the text and the drawings presented three representative items of the local culture in Xinjiang, including Turpan, mutton kebabs, and a saleswoman who was in the Uyghurs' traditional dress (see Figure 4). Turpan is a city located in the east of Xinjiang, which was historically an important trade centre along the Silk Road and currently becomes one of the most famous tourist attractions in Western China. Mutton kebabs (*yangrou chuan*) is a popular street food in Xinjiang, localised from Middle Eastern cuisine. As the third picture in Figure 4 depicts, the traditional clothing for the Uyghur women involves a long-sleeved dress with a vest and a decorated cap. The presentation of these three items suggests that the textbook writers have embedded some cultures of Chinese ethnic minorities in *PEP Primary English* to enable pupils to have a better understanding of multiculturalism in China.



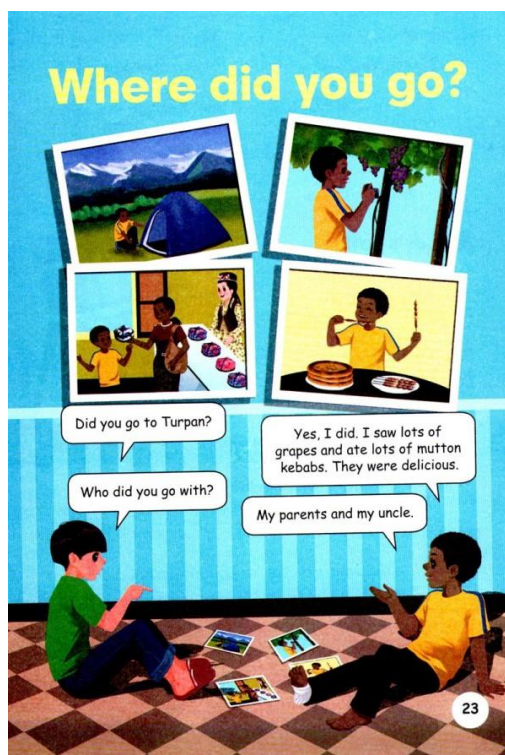


Fig. 4. Main Scene in Unit 3, *PEP Primary English Book 8* (Wu et al., 2019, p. 23).

The description of the essential occupations which are strongly associated with the people’s livelihood in modern China is exemplified in the section ‘Let’s learn’ in Unit 5 of Book 7. As can be seen in Figure 5, the drawings demonstrate four different occupations. Two of them specifically portray a postman wearing the uniform of China Post and a female police officer dressing in the uniform of the Chinese People’s Armed Police Force.

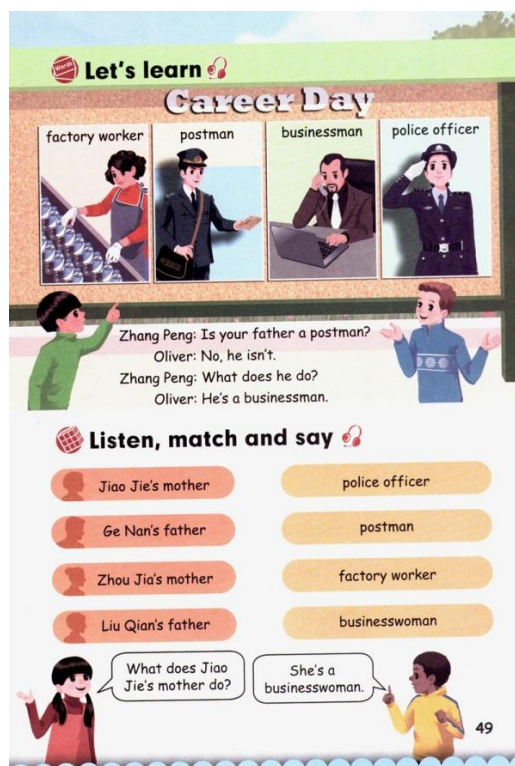


Fig. 5. ‘Let’s learn’ in Unit 5, *PEP Primary English Book 7* (Wu et al., 2019, p. 49).

Another feature of Chinese cultural representation in *PEP Primary English* is that a significant number of proper nouns such as personal names or place names are written in *Pinyin*. Take personal names for example. There are 13 main characters throughout the whole series. Three of them are Chinese characters, including *Wu Yifan*, *Chen Jie*, and *Zhang Peng*, while ten are foreigners, including *Zoom*, *Sarah*, *Miss White*, *Mike*, *Mr. Jones*, *John*, *Zip*, *Oliver*, *Amy*, and *Robin*. The number of Chinese characters accounted for over one-fifth of the main characters in total in this textbook series (23.08%). Besides, 99 personal names appeared in the textbooks. 30 of them were Chinese names, taking up around three-tenths of the total number (30.3%).

It should be noted that some special names derived from Chinese mythology such as *Chang'e* were provided in this textbook series to enhance students' knowledge of traditional Chinese culture and values. For instance, *Chang'e* occurred at the 'Story time' in Unit 3 of Book 8 (see Example 2). In Chinese mythology, *Chang'e* is best known for stealing an elixir of immortality from her husband *Hou Yi* and escaping to be the goddess of the moon. She was banished to reside in the Moon Palace with her only companion, a white rabbit who was always standing in the shade of a cinnamon tree. The tale of *Chang'e* has become a prominent role in the traditions and celebrations of Mid-Autumn Festival in China. As Example 2 shows, *Zoom* told his friend *Zip* that he dreamed about "Chang'e", "rabbit", and "tree", which corresponded with the key components of the tale of *Chang'e*.

#### Example 2.

*Zip*: Where did you go?

*Zoom*: I went to the moon.

*Zip*: How did you go there?

*Zoom*: By spaceship.

*Zip*: What did you see?

*Zoom*: I saw *Chang'e*, the rabbit and the tree.

Apart from personal names, a range of place names for Chinese provinces and cities such as *Shandong*, *Xinjiang*, *Beijing*, and *Jilin* as well as domestic tourist attractions like *Turban* and *Great Wall* occurred in the current textbook series, which allowed target students to experience some geographical features of Chinese culture. For example, the section 'Story time' in Unit 3 of Book 6 involved a dialogue between *Zoom* and *Zip*, focusing on their plans for upcoming summer holidays. Their discussion mentioned two world-renowned tourist spots in China – Grape Valley and Huangshan Mountain. The former attraction is located at the northeast of Turban in Xinjiang, which has been granted the title of "AAAAA Tourist Attraction" (the highest level) of China since 2007. The latter attraction is a World Heritage Site of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, a mountain range situated at the southern Anhui Province in China. As shown in Example 3, the dialogue further highlighted the main features of these two tourist sites. Firstly, Grape Valley has been famous for the cultivation of the sweetest and tastiest grapes, which was pointed out by *Zoom* through his utterance "The grapes there are very sweet!". Secondly, the sentences "The trees there are very famous. The clouds are beautiful!" indicated two remarkable wonders of the Huangshan Mountain's natural sceneries, namely, crooked pine trees and the sea of clouds.

#### Example 3.

*Zip*: What will you do there?

*Zoom*: We'll go to Grape Valley. The grapes there are very sweet! Grapes are my favourite fruit!

*Zoom*: In August, I'll go to Huangshan Mountain. The trees there are very famous. The clouds are beautiful!

*Zip*: Sounds great!

### 5.3. The Combability of PEP Primary English and the National Curriculum

A cross-check between *PEP Primary English* and the National Curriculum revealed that the cultural content of this textbook series not only contained all the learning objectives regarding cultural awareness for primary education as stipulated in the National Curriculum, but also considered a few of cultural items required for English education in junior high schools.

According to the achievement standards for cultural awareness in the National Curriculum (see Table 2), it is mandatory for students to establish basic cultural awareness through achieving the following learning goals step-by-step: 1) to know major activities of recreation and sports around the world, the names of representative foods and drinks in English-speaking countries, and their capital cities and national flags; 2) to understand significant landmarks in major English-speaking countries and their important holidays and festivals; and 3) to notice similarities and differences between Chinese culture and foreign culture.

**Table 2.**

Achievement standards for cultural awareness in the National Curriculum (translated and adapted from MOE, 2011).

Level	Corresponding grade	Learning objectives
2	By the completion of Grade 6 for compulsory education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To know major activities regarding recreation and sports in the world.</li> <li>To know the names of representative foods and drinks in English-speaking countries.</li> <li>To know the capitals and national flags of major English-speaking countries.</li> <li>To understand significant landmarks in major English-speaking countries, such as Big Ben in the U.K.</li> <li>To understand important holidays and festivals in English-speaking countries.</li> <li>To notice similarities and differences between Chinese culture and foreign culture in daily communications.</li> </ol>
5	By the completion of Grade 9 for compulsory education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To understand table manners and food customs in English-speaking countries.</li> <li>To have an initial understanding of geographical locations, climate features, and history of English-speaking countries.</li> <li>To understand the customs of interpersonal communication in English-speaking countries.</li> <li>To understand major activities regarding recreation and sports in the world.</li> <li>To understand major holidays and festivals in the world and their celebrations.</li> <li>To pay attention to similarities and differences between Chinese culture and foreign culture to have a better understanding of Chinese culture.</li> <li>To be able to use basic English to introduce major festivals and representative cultural practices in China.</li> </ol>

As far as Level 2 is concerned, *PEP Primary English* has included all the obligatory learning items. Firstly, the textbook series introduced a range of recreational activities and sports such as American football, table tennis (*ping-pong*), and soccer; representative foods and drinks such as *Coca-Cola*, American hamburgers, and hot dogs; national flags like the Maple Leaf of Canada, the Stars and Stripes of the U.S., and the Union Jack of the U.K.; and capital cities of English-speaking countries such as London and Canberra. Secondly, some significant landmarks such as Big Ben, the CN Tower, the Golden Gate Bridge, and kangaroos were presented in the textbooks, as well as major festivals and celebrations like Thanksgiving Day and Parents' Day. Furthermore, the content of this textbook series underlined the similarities and differences between the local culture and the foreign culture, as exemplified in the section

‘Let’s talk’ of Unit 1 in Book 8. As Example 4 lays out, *Mike* and *Wu Yifan* were discussing the differences of men’s shoe-size systems while shopping at a shoe store. The following dialogue was designed for demonstrating the distinction of shoe sizing between China and Canada, namely, China adopted the Continental European system whilst Canada utilised the U.S. size system.

**Example 4.**

*Wu Yifan:* What size are your shoes, Mike?  
*Mike:* Size 7.  
*Wu Yifan:* Size 7? That’s so small.  
*Mike:* In China I wear size 40 shoes.

In addition, two cultural items required for Level 5 in the National Curriculum were embedded in the textbook content, which appears to be slightly beyond the learning readiness of primary school students. Firstly, the cultural content of the textbooks involved geographical locations, climate features, and history of the Inner Circle countries. As an illustration, the section ‘Story time’ in Unit 2 of Book 6 demonstrated a dialogue between *Zoom* and *Koala* in terms of their plans for Christmas holidays (see Example 5). *Koala* said that he was going to swim since it was summer in Australia during Christmas. This dialogue revealed the characteristics of Australian climate, namely, Australia’s seasons are at opposite times to those in the Northern Hemisphere and thus its summer falls in Christmas.

**Example 5.**

*Zoom:* What do you usually do on Christmas Day?  
*Koala:* I usually go to the beach and swim in the sea!  
*Zoom:* You swim in winter?  
*Koala:* Christmas is in summer in Australia, so we never have snow for Christmas.  
*Zoom:* Which season do you like best?  
*Koala:* Summer. I like sunny days.

Another instance is excerpted from the section ‘Let’s talk’ of Unit 4 in Book 8 (see Example 6). When *Wu Yifan*, *Grandpa*, and *Sarah* were visiting an exhibition of school history, the dialogue between them mentioned one of the most iconic moments in space exploration history of the U.S., namely, in 1969 American astronauts became the first humans ever to land on the moon.

**Example 6.**

*Grandpa:* There was only one small building on a hill.  
*Wu Yifan:* Could you see stars at night?  
*Sarah:* Me too. One day I’m going to visit the moon.  
*Wu Yifan:* The Americans took about five days to get there in 1969.

Secondly, Chinese festivals and representative cultural practices which were stipulated as a learning objective for Level 5 in the National Curriculum appeared in the cultural content of the present textbook series. Take ‘Main Scene’ in Unit 3 of Book 6 for example. While *Oliver* and *Wu Yifan* were discussing major festivals listed on the school calendar, *Oliver* asked about Dragon Boat Festival and *Wu Yifan*’s answer involved one of its celebrations, namely, to make *zongzi*, a traditional Chinese dish made of glutinous rice and wrapped in bamboo leaves (see Example 7).

**Example 7.**

*Oliver:* When is Dragon Boat Festival?  
*Wu Yifan:* It’s usually in June. My mum will make zongzi then. I hope you can come and share some with us.  
*Oliver:* That’s very kind of you.

Similarly, in ‘Main Scene’ of Unit 4 in Book 6, the discussion between *Wu Yifan* and *Sarah* conveyed cultural knowledge of Mid-Autumn Festival including one of its practices, namely, to eat mooncakes (see Example 8).

**Example 8.**

*Sarah:* When is Mid-Autumn Day this year?  
*Wu Yifan:* September 27<sup>th</sup>.  
*Sarah:* What do you usually do on Mid-Autumn Day?  
*Wu Yifan:* We eat mooncakes.

As exemplified in Examples 5-8, *PEP Primary English* covered two cultural topics that were considered higher-level learning objectives for primary school students. This will possibly result in that some students who were not ready for learning such cultural knowledge felt frustrated or less motivated during their learning process. However, the premature teaching of those cultural topics which are slightly beyond the students’ current learning readiness may contribute to the development of L2 learners’ successful language behaviours and their intercultural communicative competence.

According to Brown (1986), second language learning is often second culture learning. L2 learners are unable to acquire a second language if they cannot understand the cultural background or social context where the language is rooted. Exposure to abundant cultural input of the target language can assist L2 learners in developing culturally appropriate language behaviours and intonation patterns in order to achieve a successful communication with members of the target language speech community (Peterson & Coltrane, 2003). As for Chinese pupils who have little natural exposure to the target language, ELT textbooks serve as the primary form of English language input and also provide the main source of cultural information to enhance the students’ understanding of language behaviours inhering in different cultures across the world. Thus, in the long run, the earlier introduction of the aforementioned two cultural topics in *PEP Primary English* could allow Chinese pupils to access a wider selection of cultural settings and corresponding language behaviours within the limited formal instruction. This may pave the way for students’ cultural learning in the next stage of English education.

As specified in the National Curriculum, English instruction for the nine-year compulsory education in China aims to enable students to develop their intercultural communicative competence. Language learner who has built up the intercultural communicative competence can establish relationships when utilizing the foreign language, achieve an effective communication by considering his or her own and the other interlocutor’s opinions, negotiate with people from diverse backgrounds, and pursue to keep facilitating his or her communicative skills (Byram, 1997; López-Rocha, 2016). Therefore, the inclusion of the aforementioned two cultural topics in *PEP Primary English* could potentially increase Chinese pupils’ general knowledge of cultural realities and further enhance their ability to mediate interactions with people from different countries or areas. Students not only need to establish an inclusive understanding of cultural differences such as the opposite features of Australian climate to the Northern Hemisphere, but also should share their local culture with other speech communities in a recipient-friendly manner such as introducing the traditions and celebrations of Dragon Boat Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival. Generally speaking, the premature instruction of such cultural information may be beneficial to the development of Chinese pupils’ intercultural communicative competence.

## 6. Conclusion and Implications

This study reports on a mixed-method analysis of cultural content embodied in the *PEP Primary English* textbook series including eight volumes designed for primary school education in Mainland China. This analysis has indicated that the cultural representation in the present textbook series showed considerable diversity while Chinese culture was appropriately represented in accordance with the values and ideologies embedded in Chinese society. In addition, the cultural content in this series demonstrated



general consistency with the National Curriculum despite the inclusion of a few higher-level cultural items.

So, how could we improve the depictions of cultural elements in order to balance between the local culture and the foreign culture in ELT textbooks for primary school education? There are three pedagogical suggestions for future textbook adaptation and development.

Firstly, the cultural materials of English textbooks need to be compatible with the fundamental requirements of the National Curriculum, and more importantly, their representation is supposed to be diversified in terms of cultural stratification and varieties of English. A comparison of two series of primary English language textbooks used in Mainland China and Hong Kong carried out by Lee and Li (2019) revealed that the mainland textbooks focused on British culture in the Inner Circle but paid insufficient attention to the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle cultures. This was not beneficial for Chinese pupils to enhance their understanding of the role of English as an international or global language for intercultural communication. Thus, ELT textbooks should be designed for covering multiple cultural categories including the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle cultures. Moreover, English language textbooks should embrace a broad range of specific contexts in relation to different varieties of English. Take *PEP Primary English* for instance. The current analysis has showed that the Outer Circle culture was underrepresented in the whole series with a highly limited provision of cultural contexts related to Singapore and Hong Kong SAR; however, other aspects such as India and Malaysia were neglected. This issue may result in students' isolated and static perception on the countries or areas represented in the abovementioned concentric circles and the functions of English in multilingual societies. Therefore, it is a sensible idea to consider more inclusive cultural backgrounds in the future adaptation of *PEP Primary English*, so that target pupils can have more opportunities to encounter various cultural and pragmatic realities.

Secondly, the delivery of cultural elements in ELT textbooks should not be restricted to explicit or superficial forms such as personal names or place names; besides, implicit presentation and meaningful contexts for cultural content need to be taken into account. Lee and Li (2019) pointed out that a mainland textbook series *New Standard English* tended to convey British culture through meaningless dialogues with reliance on the repetition of place names such as 'London' but did not describe real aspects of British cultural life. They further argued that such surface forms of culture were not sufficient for Chinese students to develop cultural knowledge (Lee & Li, 2019, p. 10). Similarly, a comparative study of high-school ELT textbook series in China and Germany from Zhang and Su (2021) indicated that China's English textbooks still presented factual knowledge and static information without effectively conveying the underlying value orientations. A positive example can be found in the present study of *PEP Primary English*. This series implicitly demonstrated British cultural traits through a passage embedding Robinson Crusoe's castaway story, which enabled target pupils to experience classic British literature and develop a deeper understanding of British cultural life.

Thirdly, as the National Curriculum calls for, English textbooks for primary education in China should be 'glocalised' through incorporating essential values and real-life cultural experiences inhering in Chinese society and global perspectives. Here is a key term to be addressed, namely, glocalisation. According to Rai and Deng (2016), glocalisation or being glocalised refers to the association of local situation with global awareness. For ELT textbooks in China, it means the content reflects English communication in Chinese context that is closely related to local Chinese community. Since English has become a *lingua franca*, it does not solely reflect Western culture or Anglo-Saxon background; instead, it is a tool whereby people from any country or region can communicate with the world (Kirkpatrick, 2000). In China, English has been promoted throughout the Chinese local contexts rather than only used in international settings (Rai & Deng, 2016). Therefore, overemphasising the global situation or Western culture in English language materials may lead to a lack of sensitivity for language use in Chinese context. English textbooks which adopt glocalised cultural materials would be more sensible for Chinese pupils, because

those materials and dialogues are more authentic and helpful in the local situation. This will also allow students to engage their own cultural backgrounds actively in the learning process and emphasise the use of English in Chinese settings as well as for global communication. That is, the glocalised ELT textbooks may help those pupils become aware of their own cultural identity whilst meeting their needs of talking about their culture with visitors (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999).

There are two strategies that may contribute to the implementation of glocalisation in Chinese ELT textbooks. The first strategy is to introduce a certain range of Chinese culture-related materials in English expressions. For example, *PEP Primary English* included traditional Chinese culture such as Mid-Autumn Festival (‘中秋节’) and the tale of *Chang’e* (‘嫦娥’) or people’s daily life activities in modern China such as travelling to Grape Valley (‘葡萄沟’). The second strategy is to embrace those topics or themes that reflect cross-cultural differences rather than merely presenting similarities or neutral aspects of culture. Previous studies on culture in language education (e.g., Graff, 1992; Hames-Garcia, 2003; Lee & Li, 2019) have indicated that one-sided congratulatory aspects of culture such as common features of characters from diverse backgrounds do not enable students to be aware of realistic differences or controversial issues. Thus, the cultural content in English instruction needs to allow learners to critically explore deep and complex cultural elements through the provision of contrasts or conflicting respects. An instance can be found in *PEP Primary English*, namely, the distinction of men’s shoe-sizing systems between China and Canada was highlighted through a dialogue among the main characters.

## 7. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Nevertheless, two major concerns remain for future research. Firstly, the generalisability of the current findings is limited in the research scope; and more textbooks which are commonly utilised in Mainland China should be analysed. Prospective investigations will pay attention to other three ELT textbook series, including *New Standard English*, *Super Kids*, and *Join in*. Secondly, further interviews with target students and teachers need to be conducted, in order to have a better understanding of 1) the possible impacts from cultural representations in ELT textbooks on L2 learners’ intercultural communicative competence and 2) learners’ and teachers’ cultural preferences.

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