

Cultural representation in English textbooks: Voices from Chinese EFL teachers

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ABSTRACT: When a person acquires a new language, culture is a central part of the process that cannot be separated. An English textbook serves as a medium for learning that is rich in the hidden cultural significance for its stakeholders. From the perspective of educators, there is limited scrutiny into how cultural values are depicted within English language textbooks. Therefore, this inquiry was conducted to examine the cultural content of textbook series in China, identifying the critical role these textbooks play in presenting culture. A questionnaire adapted from Kilickaya (2004) was used in this investigation. The study involved 625 Chinese EFL teachers, and a questionnaire was administered to all participants. Among them, 21 were randomly selected for semi-structured interviews, which were based on a semiotics framework to enhance the depth of analysis. Collected data from the questionnaire were processed for quantitative analysis while the data from the interviews were transcribed and scrutinized for qualitative analysis. Results indicated that teachers hold a positive view about cultural representation in English textbooks and advocate for a cultural semiotic representation approach that connects images, texts, and tasks to improve students' cultural awareness. Ultimately, the results of this investigation have practical implications for EFL stakeholders.

Keywords: Cultural representation, English as a foreign language, Teachers' perception, Semiotics, Textbook analysis

La representación cultural en los libros de texto de inglés: Voces de profesores chinos de inglés como lengua extranjera

RESUMEN: Cuando una persona adquiere una nueva lengua, la cultura es una parte central del proceso que no puede separarse. Un libro de texto de inglés es un medio de aprendizaje que contiene una abundancia de significados culturales ocultos en las partes interesadas. Desde el punto de vista de los educadores, existe un examen restringido que explora cómo se representa un sistema de valores culturales en un libro de texto de lengua inglesa. Por lo tanto, esta investigación se llevó a cabo para escudriñar el contenido cultural de las series de libros de texto en China, identificando la función crítica de los libros de texto en la presentación de la cultura. En esta investigación se utilizó un cuestionario adaptado de Kilickaya (2004). En el estudio participaron 625 profesores chinos de EFL y se administró un cuestionario a todos los participantes, 21 de los cuales fueron seleccionados al azar para realizar entrevistas semiestructuradas. Los datos recogidos del cuestionario se procesaron para el análisis cuantitativo, mientras que los datos de las entrevistas se transcribieron y examinaron

para el análisis cualitativo. Los resultados indicaron que la mayoría de los profesores hacían hincapié en ofrecer una visión equilibrada de las culturas globales, en la necesidad de implicar a los alumnos en temas culturales y en animarles a interactuar con diversos valores. Las conclusiones de la investigación indicaron que los ayudantes de cátedra consiguen expresar las distintas percepciones de los profesores. Los resultados mostraron que la complementación de ilustraciones y texto en los libros de texto suele estar indexada por la semiótica. En definitiva, los resultados de esta investigación tienen implicaciones prácticas para los interesados en la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera.

Palabras clave: representación cultural, inglés como lengua extranjera, percepción de los profesores, análisis de libros de texto

1. INTRODUCTION

With advancements in information technology and cross-cultural interaction, English teaching should prioritize learners' cultural consciousness and their intercultural interaction abilities (Shi, 2023). Recent research underscores culture's significance, recognizing cultural aspects of transnationalism, multilingualism, and multiculturalism (Derakhshan, 2018). Lee and Li (2020) emphasized that cultural awareness is deemed highly important in English classes. Culture in language teaching materials has become a significant focus in academic research (Brown & Habegger-Conti, 2017; Daniel, 2020; Derakhshan, 2021). Chinese English language teaching observations indicate a strong interrelationship between culture instruction and textbooks (Li & Harfitt, 2017). "Cultural-based learning material" has gained significance, introducing fresh perspectives in language pedagogy (Setyono & Widodo 2019). Scholars have increasingly investigated the integration of language and culture (Kramsch & Vinall, 2015; Sun & Kwon, 2020).

Semiotics has proven an effective methodology for analyzing textual material, which allows investigators to assess textbooks' cultural significance through tasks, texts, and images, leading to varied interpretations (Derakhshan, 2021; Weninger & Kiss, 2013). The semiotic approach has proven useful across EFL settings (Al-Naimat & Saidat, 2019; Xiong & Hu, 2022). The utilization of verbal, non-verbal, and visual interaction can significantly enhance language teaching and learning (Feng, 2019). Weninger (2013) suggests using a semiotic approach to explore meanings in foreign language textbooks, examining text, image, and pedagogic tasks' relationships and facilitating certain interpretations. Most research employs quantitative methodologies, including counting cultural depictions, or content analysis (e.g. Hamiloğlu & Mendi, 2010; Keles & Yazan, 2020). Additionally, certain studies incorporate qualitative content analysis, such as Critical Discourse Analysis, and a blend of both methods (e.g. Shi-xu, 2015; Soodmand Afshar & Sohrabi, 2020).

However, little research has utilized semiotic analysis to examine the presence of Chinese culture in English textbooks of senior high schools. Additionally, documentation of educators' attitudes towards cultural dimensions in EFL settings has been restricted. Therefore, the current investigation examines the attitudes of Chinese language teachers towards textbooks to comprehensively assess cultural representations.

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1. Cultural Representations in English Textbooks

Institutions, opinions, artifacts, and plentiful other cultural dimensions, both tangible and intangible, make up culture, which is the outcome of human civilization (Schwartz et al., 2010; Weninger & Kiss, 2013). Culture influences people's thoughts, actions, and feelings (Dahmardeh & Kim 2020). According to Messekher's (2014) proposition, culture is deeply ingrained in various facets of foreign language instruction. Textbooks are deemed potent tools for introducing learners to the customs and societies of the language they are trying to grasp. Authors and publishers face complex political and ideological choices when creating L2 textbooks (Curd-Christiansen & Weninger, 2015). Chinese language textbooks aim to develop learners' language proficiency, boost their communicative abilities, impart learning techniques, and foster cultural traditions and values (Hua et al., 2021). Consequently, textbooks function as a medium whereby the author and publisher engage with the intricacies of language, the cultural facets of a language, and the process of acquisition, with the intent of cultivating a consolidated outlook on the target language communities and cultures (Gray, 2010). It follows that textbooks represent values, deriving meanings about the target language, how it is used, who used it and its varieties, and how they are related to the target language (Curd-Christiansen & Weninger, 2015). Moreover, textbooks can ideologically yield meanings that confirm and perpetuate the dominant power arrangements regarding social class, ethnic identity, race, gender, cultural orientation, and language relations (Van Meijl, 2008). Making up a "covert curriculum", these cultural and ideological symbols underpin decisions concerning the selective depiction of the L2 setting and cultures in textbooks (Keles & Yazan, 2020).

2.2. Semiotic Approach as a Theoretical Rationale

The semiotic approach serves as an analytical tool to do a discourse analysis of how individuals communicate significance through symbols, according to Al-Naimat and Saidat (2019). This method explores to clarify how meaning-making is shaped by contextual semiotic resources (Weninger & Kiss, 2013). Semiotics is a scientific field that investigates how meaning is affected by various systems of signs. Interpretation, as defined, involves identifying three significant levels of meaning and understanding how they impact an object's behavior in the world (Weninger, 2018). Among different approaches of semiotic approaches, in this study, the model provided by Peirce was used. Peirce's model is applied in this study. Drawing on Peirce (2010), one can state that the semiotic relationship between pictures (as an example of visuals) and texts may appear in different forms, including iconic, symbolic, or indexical. Icons are highly similar to their referent (the thing, individual, or phenomena represented by a sign). Symbols represent their referent by habit, norm, or law. Indexes have a causal relationship with their object. When a picture lends itself to free interpretation (i.e., it does not promote a word or a grammatical point), the relationship can be either iconic or symbolic (Pishghadam et al., 2021). Broadly speaking, semiotics is concerned with a sort of interdisciplinary examination that involves all types of communication. Semiotics has

to do with examining the symbols and signs that are related to words, sounds, and body language. Indeed, this field of knowledge seeks to shed light on meanings, how they have come about, and how they are associated with reality (Chandler, 2007).

2.3. Related Studies

Koulaidis and Dimopoulos (2005) examined the combined effects of language and visuals in Greek textbooks. Their analyses revealed that while language played a dominant role in constructing meaning, the visual elements played a supportive role. Chen (2010) investigated integrating textual and visuals in Chinese EFL textbooks to effectively attain attitudinal curriculum objectives. The findings unveiled that presenting text and picture together enhanced students' cultural sensitivity. Weninger and Kiss (2013) utilized the Peircean semiotic hypothesis to examine cultural representations in EFL course readings in Hungary. They found that the primary method of deriving meaning focused on reading material, especially the indexical relationship between pictures and texts. Canale (2016) investigated foreign language reading courses for cultural representation. Results indicate static representation of foreign cultures, based on homogeneous behaviors, facts, or artifacts. Li (2016) studied cultural values in EFL textbooks in China. The findings revealed that many cultural principles reflect to integrate the national educational framework into English teaching for Chinese students. Derakhshan (2021) employed Peircean semiotic theory to conduct a qualitative analysis. This study centered on analyzing the semiotic correlation among three crucial factors, specifically, textual content, imagery, and task, to assess their potential in engendering and regenerating cultural connotations pertaining to the Iranian textbook.

Recognizing the importance of cultural representations in EFL textbooks, it's essential to address the limitations in empirical research on their cultural representation. Hence, a semiotic analysis of cultural representations in Chinese EFL textbooks from reputable publishers is suggested. Therefore, two research inquiries that are guiding the research are:

- RQ1. What are Chinese teachers' attitudes toward cultural issues represented in the Chinese EFL textbook series?
- RQ2. How do Chinese EFL teachers view the cultural representations of the Chinese EFL textbook series?

3. METHOD

3.1. Participants

In this study, 625 EFL teachers of both genders, with an age range of 41, were involved. Teachers were selected as participants because they are the main consumers of textbooks and can provide first-hand accounts as they directly use instructional materials. Additionally, 4 male and 17 female teachers aged 19 - 30 years old agreed to participate in an interview.

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. *Questionnaire*

To assess the depiction of cultural components, the researcher employed Kilickaya's (2004) questionnaire with 25 questions as a measure in the analysis. The questionnaire follows the Likert-scale format, and it includes five statements that range from the total agreement (5) to total disagreement (1). The study determined the internal consistency of the questionnaire to be high with a Cronbach's Alpha score of .83.

3.2.2. *A Semi-structured Interview*

Teachers were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire consisting of seven questions. The duration of each interview was approximately 20 minutes. These questions aimed to gather the perspectives of the participants on the cultural semiotic representation of Chinese EFL textbook evaluation in senior high schools. The questionnaire used was modeled after the one used in Derakhshan's (2021) study. It is notable to state that the conversations with educators were carried out in the English language and were all documented and written down word for word.

3.3. Procedure

Participants were informed of the study's goals and assured of confidentiality before survey administration, a process taking 3-4 minutes during breaks. Questionnaires were meticulously reviewed post-collection to exclude errors. Data was then tabulated for analysis. The researcher also sought school principals' assistance in providing teacher contact details for scheduling in-person interviews and requested educators to suggest optimal interview times and arrangements.

3.4. Data Analysis

The objective of this inquiry was to gather the teachers' perceptions concerning culturally significant symbols in the English language. Chi-Square analyses were conducted to verify the importance of the acquired outcomes. Additionally, concerning the qualitative data, the answers were meticulously documented and transcribed before being grouped into initial codes. As a component of the qualitative data analysis, the frequency report of interview responses was included accordingly.

4. RESULT

4.1. Quantitative Analysis

To address the first research question, teachers' responses to the questionnaire were explored. The first component of the questionnaire aimed to capture teachers' perceptions about the cultural rationale and objectives of the textbooks. The teachers' answers (N = 625) to each statement are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Teachers' perceptions of Chinese EFL textbooks: cultural rationales and objectives*

	Mean	SD	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q1.	3.91	.872	16 (2.6%)	34 (5.4%)	71 (11.4%)	375 (60.0%)	129 (20.6%)
Q2.	3.92	.842	10 (1.6%)	38 (6.1%)	76 (12.2%)	372 (59.5%)	129 (20.6%)
Q3.	4.04	.771	9 (1.4%)	19 (3.0%)	61 (9.8%)	382 (61.1%)	154 (24.6%)
Q4.	4.08	.722	6 (1.0%)	16 (2.6%)	57 (9.1%)	392 (62.7%)	154 (24.6%)
Q5	3.74	.904	13 (2.1%)	50 (8.0%)	129 (20.6%)	327 (52.3%)	106 (17.0%)
Average Total	3.9366	.63434					

As reported in Table 1, the average mean value of 3.94 indicates that teachers' perceptions of the cultural rationale and objectives of the textbooks are positive (over the expected mean of 3). Table 2 reports the results of the Chi-Square test.

Table 2. *Chi-Square tests: cultural rationales and objectives as perceived by teachers*

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
Chi-Square	684.752a	673.760a	765.424a	822.368a	474.800a
df	4	4	4	4	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 125.0.

As reported in Table 2, for all five questions in this category the significance values were below the cut-off value of 0.05. Therefore, it can be resulted that the answers reported in Table 2 above are significant. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of items in the part of the questionnaire regarding teachers' perceptions of textbook cultural materials.

Table 3. *Teachers' perceptions of the Chinese EFL textbooks: Cultural materials*

	Mean	SD	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q6.	2.12	.851	126 (20.2%)	351 (56.2%)	104 (16.6%)	33 (5.3%)	11 (1.8%)
Q7.	4.13	.732	8 (1.3%)	11 (1.8%)	51 (8.2%)	377 (60.3%)	178 (28.5%)
Q8.	3.95	.819	11 (1.8%)	32 (5.1%)	64 (10.2%)	389 (62.2%)	129 (20.6%)
Q9.	3.97	.820	10 (1.6%)	33 (5.3%)	59 (9.4%)	384 (61.4%)	139 (22.2%)
Q10.	1.95	.751	152 (24.3%)	389 (62.2%)	58 (9.3%)	18 (2.9%)	8 (1.3%)
Q11.	2.13	.879	128 (20.5%)	357 (57.1%)	82 (13.1%)	48 (7.7%)	10 (1.6%)

	Mean	SD	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q12.	4.01	.779	5 (0.8%)	30 (4.8%)	65 (10.4%)	376 (60.2%)	149 (23.8%)
Q13.	3.48	1.149	31 (5.0%)	129 (20.6%)	85 (13.6%)	268 (42.9%)	112 (17.9%)
Q14.	3.98	.789	5 (0.8%)	32 (5.1%)	76 (12.2%)	372 (59.5%)	140 (22.4%)
Q15.	3.83	.902	11 (1.8%)	49 (7.8%)	105 (16.8%)	333 (53.3%)	127 (20.3%)
Q16.	3.97	.788	7 (1.1%)	28 (4.5%)	76 (12.2%)	377 (60.3%)	137 (21.9%)
Q17.	3.98	.795	12 (1.9%)	22 (3.5%)	65 (10.4%)	392 (62.7%)	134 (21.4%)
Q18.	3.96	.774	8 (1.3%)	24 (3.8%)	79 (12.6%)	386 (61.8%)	128 (20.5%)
Q19.	4.13	.679	4 (0.6%)	10 (1.6%)	54 (8.6%)	388 (62.1%)	169 (27.0%)
Q20.	4.10	.703	5 (0.8%)	13 (2.1%)	57 (9.1%)	389 (62.2%)	161 (25.8%)
Average Total	3.5801	.36942					

Table 3 presents the teachers' perceptions of the cultural materials in the textbooks. Among the statements, the three with the highest means were providing a balanced view of world cultures, engaging learners in cultural topics, and promoting active student participation to communicate different values. However, three statements had mean values below the expected value of 3, which indicate teachers' negative perceptions about these aspects. Altogether, while there were some negative perceptions about some issues, the total average value of 3.58 indicated an overall positive view of the teachers concerning the items in this category. Table 4 shows the results of Chi-Square tests to make sure that the results obtained reported in Table 3 are significant. As reported, all items had significant value.

Table 4. *Chi-Square tests: Cultural materials as perceived by teachers*

	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17	Q18	Q19	Q20
Chi-Square	583.824 ^a	787.792 ^a	760.624 ^a	746.576 ^a	800.416 ^a	598.688 ^a	724.816 ^a	248.560 ^a	693.472 ^a	499.520 ^a	715.056 ^a	786.784 ^a	753.088 ^a	832.096 ^a	820.480 ^a
df	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 125.0.

The next component of the questionnaire aimed to capture participants' views about the class activities and cultural activities. Table 5 reports the descriptive statistics obtained from the items under this category.

Table 5. *Teachers' perceptions of Chinese EFL textbooks: Class activities and cultural activities*

	Mean	SD	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q21.	4.00	.751	6 (1.0%)	23 (3.7%)	70 (11.2%)	390 (62.4%)	136 (21.8%)
Q22.	3.99	.774	9 (1.4%)	23 (3.7%)	66 (10.6%)	392 (62.7%)	135 (21.6%)
Average Total	3.9984	.70937					

As reported in Table 5, the total average mean was about 4, indicating a highly positive perception of this category. The mean for the two items was also very close to each other, suggesting that teachers agree that the textbooks both provide the opportunity to employ language proficiency to argue about cultural issues and involve students in activities that represent foreign cultures. To see if the results are significant, Chi-square tests were run (Table 6).

Table 6. *Chi-Square tests: Class activities and cultural activities as perceived by teachers*

	Q21	Q22
Chi-Square	783.488 ^a	789.840 ^a
df	4	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 125.0.

As reported in Table 6, for all questions in this category the significance values were below the cut-off value of 0.05. Therefore, it can be stated that the answers reported in Table 5 above are significant.

The final component in the teachers' questionnaire was teaching aids. The descriptive statistics of the teachers' perceptions are presented in Table 7. As reported the average mean value of 3.96 was above the expected value of 3. The mean values for all three items were close to each other, suggesting that teachers agree that the teaching aids are effective.

Table 7. *Teachers' perceptions of Chinese textbooks: Teaching aids*

	Mean	SD	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q23.	3.98	.768	9 (1.4%)	25 (4.0%)	61 (9.8%)	404 (64.6%)	126 (20.2%)
Q24.	4.01	.706	5 (0.8%)	19 (3.0%)	64 (10.2%)	411 (65.8%)	126 (20.2%)
Q25.	3.90	.821	8 (1.3%)	33 (5.3%)	99 (15.8%)	361 (57.8%)	124 (19.8%)
Average Total	3.9637	.68180					

Finally, to make sure that the results reported in Table 7 are significant, Chi-square tests were run.

Table 8. *Chi-Square tests: Teaching aids as perceived by teachers*

	Q23	Q24	Q25
Chi-Square	843.152 ^a	889.232 ^a	628.208 ^a
df	4	4	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 125.0.

As indicated in Table 8, the value of significance for all items within this category fell below the cut-off value of 0.05. Consequently, the findings presented in Table 7 are confirmed to be statistically significant.

4.2 Qualitative Analysis

Among the 625 Chinese EFL teachers who have finished the questionnaire, 21 were randomly selected for semi-structured interviews, which were based on a semiotics framework to enhance the depth of analysis.



Figure 1. *Example extracted from Volume 2, Unit 5, First Aid' (p.54).*

In the activity illustrated in Figure 1, learners were tasked with identifying images of health issues and medical emergencies and labeling them with pertinent terms, including “heart attack,” “drowning,” “sprained ankle,” “poisoning,” and “bleeding,” thereby demonstrating the connection between text and image. On the subsequent exercise on the same sheet, students answered questions, and the results indicated an indexical semiotic bond

between the picture and text in this pre-reading activity of picture-phrase matching. This enabled students to gain a deeper understanding of first-aid measures.

Regarding this activity, the first question in the interviews is “What do you think the following image represents?” as it tries to consider the indexical connection between the text and figure. The examination of the teacher’s responses to the first question yielded 2 themes, displayed in Table 9.

Table 9. *Results of thematic analysis for the first research question*

	Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Q1.	Medical emergencies	17	80%
	Vocabulary exercise	4	20%

According to Table 9, most of the teachers perceived the first image to be related to medical emergencies. As teacher 2 stated:

“This image contains several pictures of different medical emergencies and requires students to answer questions about calling 120 for emergencies. Therefore, it is a piece of English learning material about first aid, examines students’ recognition and expression of various medical emergencies, as well as their ability to describe the emergencies in English”.

Or the other pinpointed that:

“This image contains five pictures and represents five types of medical emergencies”.

The second question is “Do you think this image is related to the vocabulary and questions?”. Three key themes emerged from teachers’ answers. Table 10 represents these three themes and their frequencies.

Table 10. *Results of thematic analysis for the second research question*

	Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Q2.	To a great extent	14	67%
	To some extent	6	29%
	Not related	1	4%

According to the above table, most of the teachers considered the images to be closely related to vocabulary tasks. For instance, as teacher 6 stated:

“Through asking students to match the pictures with the English expression, Figure 1 examines students’ grasp of relative English vocabulary”.

Or the other declared that:

“The text part of Figure 1 is presented in the form of words, with pictures to help students effectively understand the corresponding words, so the question is related to images and vocabulary”.

A group of teachers also perceived that the images were weakly associated with the given tasks. Few teachers also asserted that there was no association between the images and the tasks.

Regarding the third question “Do these images help students answer the follow-up question?” Two major themes appeared from the teachers’ responses. These themes are demonstrated in Table 11.

Table 11. *Results of thematic analysis for the third research question*

	Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Q3	To a great extent	14	67%
	To some extent	7	33%

As displayed in the above table, all teachers considered the images to be helpful in responding to the follow-up questions. For instance, one teacher articulated that:

“Through the pictures, students can easily associate with the corresponding vocabulary, which is convenient for students to recall the plot and answer the questions”.

Or the other proposed that:

“Because most students have not called 120 before, and those photos awaken the memories related to emergencies. Students can describe emergencies and accidents in the pictures as practice”.

Regarding the fourth question “Is there any relation between and across the image, vocabulary, and tasks”? The assessment of teachers’ viewpoints towards the relationships between images, texts, and tasks terminated in two main themes, including “Image-vocabulary-task” strong relationship.

Table 12. *Results of thematic analysis for the fourth research question*

	Themes	Frequency	Percentage
QQ4	strong relationship	19	90%
	less strong relationship	2	10%

As reported in Table 12, most teachers considered images, texts, and tasks to be strongly related. Other teachers conceived that images, texts, and tasks were weakly related to each other. For example, teacher 21 declared that:

“The image can quickly match the relevant phrases and words through the presentation of the images to help students better remember the words”.

Or teacher 13 stated:

“According to the image, during the process of explaining these pictures, the teacher can introduce some new words to students. Students master some unfamiliar vocabulary. Besides, they can better finish the questions in the group”.

Regarding the next question “What other images do you think could have been included instead of this image to make a better relationship between this image and the vocabulary building and questions”, some agreed to change or modify the pictures. All teachers agreed that picture 3 inadequately represents “poising.” For example, teacher 8 explained that:

“I think it can be replaced with an image of a fallen person with a medicine bottle next to him; Pills can also be placed around the bottle to better match words”.

Also, they pointed out that some of the images in Figure 1 have not been suitably chosen, which can conquer the meaning-making process and even limit the indexical connection between the text and shapes. As teacher 14 stated:

“I may choose to present a layout of an emergency department in a hospital with five patients having separate medical emergencies and waiting in different compartments, which may be more relevant to 120”.

Or teacher 9 proposed that:

“More cartoons or animations can be used instead of real pictures of people, to avoid those images to be too violent or bloody for young students”

5. DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to examine Chinese EFL textbooks’ cultural content and their role in presenting culture. Results showed teachers’ positive view on cultural representation in textbooks and their support for a cultural semiotic representation approach. Echoing the results of this study, Saemee and Ra (2021) maintain that the studies conducted recently on the representation of culture in EFL textbooks show most of the curricula and books revolve around the native speaker cultures, turning a blind eye to the important consideration of multiculturalism. Likewise, an investigation carried out by Yahri and Susanti (2016) showed that the target culture was featured more prominently compared to their sources, mirroring the views of the students in the present study that textbooks lack a balanced representation of cultures. In the same vein, Tajeddin and Bahrebar (2017) raised the concern that the global English language teaching textbooks used by various local cultures and groups are designed by native professionals in English-speaking countries and most of these textbooks take on a one-size-fits-all approach that turns a blind eye to the differences in the cultures.

The first component in the questionnaire was aimed at eliciting teachers’ perceptions of the cultural rationale and objectives of the textbooks. Overall, the average mean value of 3.94 indicates the teachers’ perceptions of the cultural rationale and objectives of the textbooks are positive. Consistent with the findings of this investigation, a study carried out by Monfared et al. (2016) sought to shed light on teachers’ perceptions of culture in EFL classrooms. The results showed a positive outcome to the extent that they believed that being a non-native English speaker can be deemed as a benefit, both culturally and linguistically. This result is in the same line with that of a study conducted by Onalan (2005) that dealt with L2 learning as a gateway to other cultures in his inquiry on teachers’ insights and the

prominence of culture. He concluded that teachers can enhance students' awareness of other cultures by focusing on cultural activities, asserting that it is essential for L2 teachers to be aware of cultural aspects. This is because foreign language learning makes it possible for teachers and learners to create connections with other cultures.

Regarding the teachers' perceptions about the cultural materials in the textbooks, the results indicated that the majority of them insisted on the provision of a balanced view of world cultures, the necessity of engaging learners in cultural topics, and encouraging learners to communicate different values. In the same vein, Yamada (2010) maintained that textbooks can be interpreted and evaluated as curricular materials, which represent images of society and culture, reflecting social, cultural, socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts; however, this result contradicts Khodabandeh and Mombini's (2018) study, the results of which showed that teachers and students believed that the textbook provided a balanced mixture of various activities that encourage learners to practice communicatively. The result of this study was replicated by Jantadej and Charubusp (2018), as well. They carried out a study to shed light on how secondary school teachers in Thailand view intercultural content and the instruction of such content in EFL classrooms. Based on the findings, the EFL teachers attached significance to the incorporation of intercultural activities. Along the same lines, an investigation conducted by Azizpour (2021) showed that the teachers enjoyed a critical awareness of EFL materials, emphasizing that all relevant cultures need to be equally represented in teaching activities and materials.

The next component of the questionnaire sought to elicit teachers' views about the class activities and cultural activities. The results are quite telling, with an overall average mean score of 3.9984, which underscores a highly positive perception among teachers. The results not only highlight the importance of class and cultural activities in English textbooks but also emphasize the need for continued curricular development that incorporates such activities. It is through these activities that students can develop a deeper appreciation for language and culture, fostering a more holistic educational experience. The results are supported by the research of Klak and Martin (2003) and Kurpis and Hunter (2017), which have consistently highlighted the importance of integrating cultural and interactive components into language learning. Such activities are essential for enhancing linguistic proficiency and expanding cultural understanding, thereby fostering a nuanced comprehension of the world through language study.

The final component in the Teachers' questionnaire was teaching aids. The research aligns with Bayyurt (2006) in affirming the efficacy of teaching aids and the great influence of teaching strategies and teacher experience on cultural integration in L2 education. It highlights teachers' autonomy in selecting cultural content and their belief in fostering a comprehensive cultural consciousness among learners through the strategic use of images that activate textbook content and critical thinking. Teachers advocate for a textbook presentation that seamlessly connects images, texts, and tasks to enhance quick engagement and problem-solving through resource integration. They emphasize the importance of guided instruction to improve students' ability to integrate resources, thereby deepening their understanding of English and exposure to diverse cultures, which is crucial for developing intercultural competence.

Regarding the semiotic analysis of the selected representations, the findings of this inquiry are in tune with those of Wenninger and Kiss (2013). It is indicated that EFL text-

books for language students in China mainly consist of indexical relations between text, figures, and tasks, indicating a concentration on denotative meaning. Some figures include cultural content, but this is not fully employed as it does not permit learners to establish their relationships and interpretations. Therefore, learners are also restricted in logical thinking, which can gradually result in stubborn and stereotypical attitudes. To avoid this and to make some instances more culturally oriented, instructors can play an important role. From the future English teachers' attitudes, it is significant to highlight the significance of developing autonomy and indicating one's opinions when debating topics associated with cultural content.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study aimed to assess the cultural content in Chinese EFL textbooks, highlighting their crucial role in cultural education. The findings passionately call for the creation and integration of culturally balanced materials that are replete with engaging visual resources, which have the potential to significantly enrich the learning process. It posits that such materials, when thoughtfully combined with a semiotic approach, can inspire a deeper understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity. Moreover, the research emphasizes the indispensable role of collaboration among teachers, textbook developers, and trainers. It is through such collaborative efforts that educators can effectively nurture a sense of global awareness among learners, empowering them to become competent participants in our increasingly interconnected world.

While the study provides valuable insights, it acknowledges its limitations in scope and recommends a more expansive analysis. This includes adopting a questionnaire designed within the framework of semiotics for quantitative analysis, examining textbooks from a wider array of publishers across China, spanning all grade levels. The research suggests that future studies adopt a multifaceted methodological approach to achieve a holistic understanding of cultural representation in EFL education. This enhanced analytical perspective will enable subsequent studies to expose a nuanced spectrum of cultural representations, thereby deepening the understanding of their pedagogical implications for teaching and learning processes.

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