

Evaluation of the Cultural Aspects in the University English Textbook, *New Era Mingde College English - Integrated Coursebook 1*

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Abstract—*New Era Mingde College English* is the first set of general college English textbooks compiled under the background of the construction of courses with morality cultivation in China. This study employed content analysis and corpus analysis to explore the representation of different types of culture in the textbook, *New Era Mingde College English-Integrated Coursebook 1*, and to explore whether the cultural representation follows the requirements of the construction of courses with morality cultivation. Data analysis was conducted based on the two classifications of cultures focusing on the countries and forms of cultural representation. The results mainly indicated that 1) though the target culture was the most dominant, the percentage of Chinese culture was greatly improved compared with previous studies, and the international culture was represented the least in the examined textbooks; 2) As for cultural categories, the representation of cultural persons was the most, followed by cultural communities and products, and cultural perspectives and practices were represented the least in of textbook; 3) The cultural content of this textbook generally followed the requirements of textbook compilation under the construction of courses with morality cultivation. Based on the findings, suggestions for further study and the construction of English textbooks in the future were put forward.

Index Terms—Countries and forms of cultural representation, courses with morality cultivation, English textbook

I. INTRODUCTION

Teachers, textbooks, and students are the three basic elements of classroom teaching activities. As the materials are compiled and selected for teaching, textbooks have become the main channel for students to acquire knowledge and develop their abilities, as well as the link between teachers and students and the intermediary of teacher-student interaction [1]. Richards [2] stressed the pertinent role of textbooks as a crucial resource for both teachers and learners despite the innovation of new technologies, which emphasizes the importance of textbooks. As for its function, the textbook is not only a product of curriculum but also a cultural product [3]. It acts as the primary source of cultural information in language teaching and learning in many educational contexts [4]. This is especially true for English textbooks, which are not only important materials to promote students' language learning and understanding of the target language culture and the multi-culture of the world, but they also should inherit and innovate local culture, provide opportunities for students to explain the culture of their native

language in English, and provide space for students to understand, analyze and evaluate the multi-culture of the world [5]. According to a document from the Chinese Ministry of Education [6], "Textbooks must reflect the will of the Party and the country, reflect the style of China and the Chinese nation, reflect the basic values of the country and the nation, reflect the accumulation and innovation achievements of human cultural knowledge, and carry out the fundamental task of building morality and educating people... guide students to strengthen their cultural confidence and take on the great responsibility for the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." In addition, the construction of courses with morality cultivation in China also puts forward new requirements for textbooks, and then the *New Era Mingde College English* was compiled.

Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the cultural elements in textbooks by analyzing the texts that function as representational samples of language and culture. The present study employs a content and corpus analysis of *New Era Mingde College English Integrated Coursebook 1* to explore the representation of different kinds of cultures in the textbook and evaluate whether the cultural representation achieves consistency with the requirements of the morality cultivation of the curriculum.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between culture and language has been discussed for a long time [7–10]. Brown [11] noted that language and culture are intermixed such that it is impossible to separate one from the other without causing it to lose its importance. Successful foreign language instruction in all skills relies on emphasizing the inextricable interconnection between language and culture [7]. Moreover, Bennet *et al.* [12] accentuated that separating language and culture is out of the question. They asserted that learning a language without its underlying culture led to the learners' becoming fluent fools. Certain cultural background knowledge was beneficial for the improvement of language application ability and communicative ability [13].

Textbooks serve as the primary form of language input for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) [14]. According to Cunningsworth [15], sets of social and cultural values which are immanent in their make-up, are conveyed directly or indirectly by textbooks. Language materials should contain a variety of cultural types, including local culture, which can help learners develop an interest in language learning and foster motivation, and should not be limited to native English speakers [16, 17]. This aspect is connected with the category of culture, from the perspective

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of the country, Kachru and Nelson [18] divided World Englishes into the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle, and Cortazzi and Jin [19] classified culture as Target culture, Source culture, and International culture. From the perspective of cultural category, Moran [20] distinguished culture as cultural products, practices, perspectives, communities, and persons. The present study adapted Cortazzi and Jin's [19] and Moran's [20] classifications.

There are some earlier studies probed into the representation of cultures and communities in language textbooks [14, 21-24]. Most of them found that the dominant culture in the examined textbooks was target cultures, especially Anglo-American cultural images. The source culture was neglected to a great extent, failing to engage language learners with cultural confidence and critical reflection on their own cultural values. For example, Al-Sofi B [25] evaluated the cultural aspects in the University English Textbook, *Well Read 1*, and found that the target and the international target cultures predominate with little reference to the learners' source culture. Keles and Yazan [26] conducted a diachronic content analysis to explore how the representation of cultures and communities has evolved in the *New Headway* elementary-level textbook (NHE) across five editions since its first edition's publication in 1993. The findings mainly indicated that the Inner Circle has maintained its dominance in NHE's content over five editions and there was an imbalance favoring European cultures against non-European cultures in the Expanding Circle. What's more, the Expanding Circle / Non-European and Outer Circle are underrepresented with around 10% of the textbook content. Also, Zhang and Li *et al.* [27] examined the representation of cultures across three sets of national English textbooks currently used in China by conducting a synchronic content analysis to explore what and how cultures are represented in the textbooks. The results indicated that American and British culture dominated the culture of inner circle countries and international culture was represented the least in all three textbooks, while Chinese culture was represented more than the cultures of inner circle countries in two sets of textbooks, reflecting that the integration of Chinese culture in textbooks has increased to a certain extent.

After reviewing the area of cultural representation above, regarding previous studies concerning the present textbook of *New Era Mingde College English*, the researchers mainly explained the compilation concept and practice of this set of textbooks under the ideas of courses with morality cultivation [1, 28, 29]. In addition, Hu and Xiao [30], taking *New Era Mingde College English—Integrated Coursebook 2* as an example, adopted identity theory to discuss how the learning objectives, content, and activities in foreign language textbooks help students better understand the situational meaning of Chinese cultural identity, promote their Chinese culture learning behaviors, activate and establish their Chinese cultural identity, as well as provide them with chances of identity negotiation with Chinese culture practitioner, hence strengthening their identification with Chinese culture and enhancing their ability to promote Chinese culture.

However, till now, no such study analyzes and evaluates *New Era Mingde College English* textbooks from the

perspective of cultural elements with the help of corpus tools. Therefore, it is crucial to explore the different types of culture in the textbook and then to check whether the cultural representation follows the requirements of the construction of courses with morality cultivation. It sets the research background against the backdrop of the courses on the morality cultivation dimensions in China. Thus, the findings may contribute to future language teaching policy planning and English curriculum reforms in China. It can be a reference to other English as a Foreign Language (i.e., EFL) countries to keep a balance between local and target cultures when compiling English textbooks.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. *The Present Textbook*

New Era Mingde College English is the first set of general college English textbooks, which is contributed by the field of college English teaching under the background of courses with morality cultivation and highlights the task of moral education, value-building orientation, and educational function of textbooks in China. There are three volumes of teaching materials for students of grades 1-2 in universities.

The data of this study are collected from the textbook: *New Era Mingde College English- Integrated Coursebook 1*. It was co-compiled by Wang Shouren, Huang Guowen [31], Liu zhengguang, etc., and published by Higher Education Press (2021). The textbook consists of eight units and there are two texts in each unit. The present study mainly focuses on the cultural elements that occur in the sixteen texts.

B. *Research Questions*

To evaluate the cultural aspects in the university English textbook, this study aims to address the following questions:

RQ1. What is the frequency of different cultures represented in the examined textbook?

RQ2. What is the most dominant culture(s) in the examined textbook?

RQ3. To what extent is the cultural content of the textbook compatible with the requirements of the morality cultivation concept of the curriculum?

C. *Research Procedure*

The textbook analysis procedure mainly involves four steps. The first step is to develop the cultural classification criteria for the textbook. Culture can be classified according to the country and the different definitions of culture in academia [32]. First of all, according to the country, combined with the background of English as the international lingua franca and the national conditions of the increasingly frequent communication between China and people of all nationalities in the world, this paper is mainly based on the classification of Cortazzi & Jin [19], which can be divided into (1) **Source cultures**. For example, the English textbooks for Chinese students, that is, Chinese culture; the English textbooks for French students, that is, French culture. (2) **Target cultures**. Namely, the culture of the country where English is the mother tongue (UK, USA, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Ireland). (3) **International cultures**. All other countries that do not use English as their mother tongue shall be classified as international culture. Secondly, based on

different understandings of culture, this study uses the cultural classification of Moran [20] for reference and divided culture into five types: **cultural products, cultural practices, cultural perspectives, cultural communities, and cultural persons**. Cultural products are those that are created to meet the needs of human survival and development, such as novels, movies, buildings, and food. Cultural practices refer to the way of human life and behavior, including cultural rituals, activities, celebrations, and traditions. Cultural perspectives deal with the way people regard things, relating to perceptions, beliefs, values, and attitudes. Cultural communities refer to the culture divided according to different ethnic groups, languages, gender, race, religion, socioeconomic class, and other groups. For instance, black culture is one kind of cultural community. Cultural persons are those well-known figures of a certain cultural group (e.g., scientists, singers, writers.) that may convey a certain national culture.

To sum up, the cultural analysis framework of this study is shown in Fig. 1.



Fig. 1. Representation of Culture in English Textbooks (adopted from Cortazzi & Jin, 1999 & Moran, 2009).

The second step is to convert the PDF of the textbook to Word format and select the two reading texts of each unit. And then tagging those elements presented in the textbook according to the established criteria of cultural categories sentence by sentence. It is necessary to calculate the frequency of each type in the whole textbook. If two types are involved in one sentence, count both sides. For example, the sentence “mainstream Western values emphasize freedom while Chinese values emphasize harmony”, involves both western values and Chinese values. Thus, the frequency of source culture and target culture both increase once.

The third step is to tabulate the frequency of different cultural types in the textbook and make a comparison between these categories.

The fourth step is to import all sentence corpora containing

cultural elements and the whole 16 texts into Sketch Engine respectively to create two self-build corpora. After that, the cultural elements in the textbook are further evaluated with reference to the analysis results of Sketch Engine and the frequency distribution of various types of cultures.

D. Data Analysis

First, Content analysis is a widely-used research instrument to analyze the content of written texts concerning specific words, concepts, and their interrelationship [33]. Therefore, this method is used in the study to investigate the different forms of cultural aspects sentence by sentence and then identify the predominant culture.

Second, corpus analysis has been applied in many aspects. In the present study, Sketch Engine, a corpus manager and text analysis software developed by Lexical Computing CZ s.r.o. in 2003, was used in the study to help analyze the keywords and phrases in the texts. These keywords or phrases can help us further illustrate and understand the different types of cultures in the textbook.

IV. RESULTS

A. Category of Country Dimensions of The Cultural Content Representation

Table I summarizes the frequency of three cultural dimensions in *New Era Mingde College English-Integrated Coursebook 1*. As indicated in Table I, Target culture was the most dominant cultural element among the three types with 75 and 49.67% of the total cultural elements in this kind of classification. The second frequently occurring dimension was the source culture aspect with 65 and 43.05%, respectively. International culture was the last frequent cultural dimension with 11 and 7.28%. In general, the target culture accounts for the largest proportion, followed by the Source culture and the international culture. What’s more, there is little difference in the proportion of the target culture and source culture, indicating that the phenomenon of neglecting native culture in foreign language textbooks found in many previous studies has been greatly improved. At the same time, this is also in line with the compilation concept of the textbook being studied, largely incorporating Chinese culture and roughly balancing the contents of Chinese and foreign cultures.

TABLE I: FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE OF DIFFERENT CULTURAL ELEMENTS IN THE CATEGORY OF COUNTRY

Countries	Frequency	Percent
Source culture	65	43.05%
Target culture	75	49.67%
International culture	11	7.28%
Total	151	100%

Table II provides samples of the above-mentioned three cultural elements. For instance, in the first sentence, “Chinese concept of harmony”, “the tai chi philosophy and yin-yang dialectic” are mentioned. These are Chinese cultures; therefore, they belong to the “Source culture”. The second sentence refers to the meaning of “harmony” in English, so it can be classified as “Target culture”. Then the third one is an

African proverb; thus, it is regarded as “International culture”.

TABLE II: SAMPLE OF CULTURAL ELEMENTS IN THE CATEGORY OF COUNTRY DIMENSIONS

Source culture	Target culture	International culture
The traditional Chinese concept of harmony, along with its ideological system, includes both a worldview and a methodology, such as the tai chi philosophy and yin-yang dialectic.	In English, harmony means the achievement of accord or agreement without conflict or fighting.	“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” — African proverb

B. Five Dimensions of the Content of the Cultural Representation

The next table provides the frequency of the five cultural contents in the textbook.

As shown in Table III, this textbook covered all the cultural categories. Specifically, cultural persons occupy a large proportion of cultural elements among these five types with 42.97% of the total number of cultural elements. The second and third frequently occurring dimension was communities and products with 21.94% and 18.99%, respectively. Perspectives were the third frequently occurring cultural dimension with 13.92%. Practices were the last frequent cultural dimension with 10.13%.

TABLE III: FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE OF FIVE CULTURAL ELEMENTS

Cultural types	Frequency	Percent
Cultural products	45	18.99%
Cultural practices	24	10.13%
Cultural perspectives	33	13.92%
Cultural communities	52	21.94%
Cultural persons	83	35.02%
Total	237	100%

Table IV provides samples of the five cultural elements. In the first sentence, “BenCao Gangmu” is a book written by Li Shizhen, so it belongs to a kind of cultural product. Then, it is necessary to put the second sentence in its original context to better understand it. It described a situation that the author was bitten by a spider in a poor village and there was no doctor. When facing this kind of problem, local people would put their hands on fire which is a way of human behavior, namely, cultural practice. Thirdly, cultural perspectives connect with such aspects as perceptions, beliefs, values, and so on. Here, the third sentence presented the difference between western and Chinese values. Thus, it is a typical example of perspective. Next, “African American” is a kind of ethnic group, so it was classified as a cultural community. Finally, the cultural person can be easily distinguished from others. “Deng Jiaxian” is a famous Chinese scientist, so he is regarded as a well-known figure that represents Chinese culture.

TABLE IV: SAMPLE OF FIVE CULTURAL ELEMENTS

Product	Practice	Perspective	Community	Person
Thus, around the	I ran to my mom	For instance, mainstream	As an African American man,	Deng Jiaxian was

age of 30, he began to work for the rest of his life on what was to become Bencao Gangmu.	for help — but instead of taking me to a doctor, my mom set my hand on fire.	Western values emphasize freedom while Chinese values emphasize harmony.	there are so many incidents of “microaggressions” that you experience throughout your life and career.	always the first to take a risk. Since the first nuclear experiment, he always stood on the front lines.
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C. Keywords from Sketch Engine

Keywords are words (single-token items), that appear more frequently in the focus than in the reference corpus. They can be used to identify what is specific to one corpus (i.e., focus corpus) in comparison with another corpus (i.e., reference corpus). Keywords can be extracted using the Keywords & Terms tool in Sketch Engine. Here, two self-build corpora were used as the focus corpus respectively. One is all sentences containing cultural elements and the other is the whole 16 texts in the textbook. Meanwhile, enTenTen which is the largest corpus in Sketch Engine [34] was used as the reference corpus. Table V is one of the results of the single-word terms gained from Sketch Engine. In the original results, some names were split into two parts. For example, “Deng Jiaxian” was divided into two keywords as “Deng” and “Jiaxian”. When this happened, it was manually restored as one word.

TABLE V: SINGLE-WORD KEYWORDS FROM SKETCH ENGINE (SEQUENCE)

S	Keywords	S	Keywords	S	Keywords	S	Keywords
1	Deng Jiaxian	11	A-Bomb	21	people	31	yin-yang
2	Slotin	12	Jean-Paul	22	Chen-Ning Yang	32	Mencius
3	Li Shizhen	13	Sartre	23	Li Yanwen	33	Tamir
4	Bencao Gangmu	14	inclusiveness	24	pre-qin	34	Chatterton
5	hexie	15	Deng-Yu	25	benevolence	35	multiparty
6	Kelley Kosow	16	Spanish	26	CAEP	36	manliness
7	chopsticks	17	Qian Sanqiang	27	James Shields	37	medica
8	Kahlil Gibran	18	Tian’anmen	28	analects	38	Maslow
9	H-Bomb	19	five-starred	29	Thomas Carlyle	39	redefinition
10	Tyalt	20	self-discipline	30	Pixar	40	Trayvon Martin

As can be seen from Table V, a large part of the keywords are names, which is consistent with the result that cultural persons account for a relatively large proportion in Table III. In addition, among all the names, there are 7 Chinese names and 13 foreign names. It can be seen that the target culture and source culture play a major role in the textbook, but relatively speaking, there are more target cultures, which further confirms the results in Table I. In addition, there are some typical Chinese cultural products in this list, such as “Bencao Gangmu”, “Chopsticks” and “Tian ‘Tiananmen’”, further increasing the content of Chinese culture in the textbook.

The textbook is considered the main learning resource and

vehicle for delivering cultural content and developing students' intercultural communicative competence [14]. As Table VI illustrates, almost each of the above phrases is related to culture. For instance, such terms as "Chinese value", "Chinese culture", "Chinese concept" and others highlight the integration of Chinese culture in the book. Besides, when it comes to "soft power", it is easy for learners to think of culture as well, in that cultural soft power is a very important component of comprehensive national strength.

TABLE VI: MULTI-WORD KEYWORDS FROM SKETCH ENGINE (S-SEQUENCE)

S	Keywords	S	Keywords	S	Keywords
1.	cultural intelligence	11.	materia medica	21.	Robin Hood tale
2.	Deng Jiaxian	12.	academic integrity	22.	bomb development
3.	Bencao Gangmu	13.	atomic bomb	23.	value priority
4.	Li Shizhen	14.	George Floyd	24.	medical position
5.	Chinese value	15.	soft power	25.	poisonous spider
6.	Chinese culture	16.	solo beat team	26.	material gift
7.	life of integrity	17.	official medical position	27.	material strength
8.	Chinese concept	18.	concept of harmony	28.	hard power
9.	breaking rule	19.	piece of plutonium	29.	value system
10.	individual value	20.	Yu Min	30.	different culture

V. DISCUSSION

The findings in this study reveal that the examined textbook covers a variety of cultural aspects. From the perspective of different countries of cultural elements, although the target culture still occupies the dominant position, followed by the source culture and the international culture. However, there is no significant difference in the proportion of the source culture and the target culture, which indicates that the phenomenon of neglecting native culture in some other foreign language textbooks has been greatly improved. This is inconsistent with some previous studies [14, 35, 36]. For example, Liu (2013) launched a study to explore the cultural categories and themes put forward in Chinese EFL textbooks for the university level. The results revealed that the textbooks were replete with target culture and a very small percentage was devoted to international culture and source culture. Meanwhile, the result is in line with the compilation concept of the textbook in the preface, integrating a large amount of Chinese culture, and meets the requirements of the morality cultivation concept of the curriculum for textbook compilation, roughly balancing the contents of Chinese and foreign culture.

From the perspective of cultural types including products, practices, perspectives, communities, and persons, these five categories are all covered in the texts of this textbook, among which cultural figures account for the largest proportion. One of the reasons could be the texts in the examined book involve many stories of different Chinese and foreign figures. When telling stories, many other characters will be mentioned as well. Persons, as a cultural aspect, should be considered a key factor to develop young learners' language learning because they are notable models who could serve as representatives of a specific culture [37]. What's more, cultural persons and products are tangible cultures that are apparent and explicit

and can be perceived and recognized easily [38]. These two kinds of cultures are commonly found in English Language Teaching (ELT) or EFL textbooks in different contexts [39-41]. However, practices, perspectives, and communities are more likely to be intangible cultural categories such as ways of life, attitude, rules, traditions, and values [38, 41].

As for keywords from Sketch Engine, on the one hand, those single-word keywords mainly involve cultural persons and products, which can be connected with what we have discussed in the former paragraph. On the other hand, almost every multi-word term is closely related to culture, not only Chinese culture. This can help learners think more deeply. We should systematically integrate culture into the textbook, but not deliberately limit it to Chinese culture. At the same time, the integration of Chinese culture into textbooks should avoid using English to talk about Chinese culture that students are already familiar with. The focus is that the selected materials can well guide learners to think about cultural phenomena, deeply understand cultural connotations, and thus cultivate cultural awareness.

In addition, through the above analysis, it can be found that the cultural content in the examined textbook demonstrates general consistency with the *College English Teaching Guidelines* published nationwide in 2020 and *Guidelines for Morality Cultivation Construction of Curriculum in Colleges and Universities*, despite the inclusion of a few international cultural items. It roughly balanced the Chinese and target cultural content, consciously integrated core socialist values into the texts, and present the ideological and political elements of the curriculum, which will have a far-reaching influence on students.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

This study focused on the cultural content embodied in *New Era Mingde College English-Integrated Coursebook 1*, including eight units and sixteen texts. The findings have shown that there are varieties of cultures represented in the examined textbook, among which the target culture still occupies the largest proportion. However, what is worth mentioning is that the representation of Chinese culture was greatly improved, almost catching up with the target culture. Various Chinese culture was properly selected in line with the values and ideologies embedded in Chinese society. Meanwhile, from the aspect of the five dimensions of cultural content, the cultural person was the most representative one. In addition, the cultural content in the textbook showed general consistency with the requirements of textbook compilation under the construction of courses with morality cultivation.

Textbook researchers may further explore this field. For one thing, they are suggested to further evaluate the effect of the cultural presentation in the textbook and its impact on students' learning based on the use of the textbook. For another, Sketch Engine has been used in this study and it matters. So, future research can analyze different features of textbooks like the language characteristics with the help of corpus tools.

As for the compilation of textbooks, firstly, the selection of cultural materials in teaching materials should adapt to the syllabus and compilation concept, and reasonably balance the

local culture and the target culture. At the same time, the writer should take into account the diversity of cultures around the world, appropriately increasing the integration of international culture; Third, enough attention needs to be paid to the strategy of representing local culture in textbooks. Taking Chinese culture as an example, it is important to avoid simply translating Chinese culture that students have already been familiar with in English. Cultural types should be diversified, including both traditional culture, modern culture, and contemporary culture; Furthermore, enough attention should be attached to the student's actual cultural experience, cognition, and emotion.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Tian Liu conducted the research and analyzed the data and then wrote the paper; Mo gave suggestions and helped revise the paper; all authors had approved the final version.

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