

# Study of the Presentation of Cultural Elements in the PEP English Textbooks for Junior Middle Schools

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## Abstract

With the increasing impact of globalization, the cultivation of cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication skills has become more and more important in English teaching. Textbooks play a crucial role as materials and carriers for English teaching. The way in which Chinese and foreign cultural elements are distributed and presented in textbooks can significantly affect students' learning of cultural knowledge and the development of their cultural awareness. To enhance students' cultural awareness, this study analyzed the cultural elements in PEP English textbook for junior high schools. The statistical results indicate that this textbook predominantly features Chinese culture, followed by British and American cultures, with non-target language cultures being the least presented. The presentation of cultures is primary through pictures and texts. The distribution of cultural elements is not balanced, and there is less cultural knowledge in the first book of the seventh grade. To address this issue, it is suggested that textbook writers should pay attention to the presentation of non-target language cultures, innovate the forms of cultural presentation, and distribute cultural knowledge. Teachers should strive to enhance their cultural literacy, deeply explore cultural elements, innovate cultural teaching methods and enhance students' cultural confidence. The aim is to deal with the cultural knowledge in the teaching materials scientifically and further develop students' cultural awareness.

## Keywords

PEP English Textbooks for Junior High Schools; Culture Presentation; Cultural Awareness; Cross-cultural Communication Skills.

## 1. Background of the Study

According to the English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition), students' core literacy should include language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability. Cultural awareness involves understanding Chinese and foreign cultures, appreciating outstanding cultures, and demonstrating cross-cultural cognition, attitude and behavioral choices in the new era. The cultivation of cultural awareness can help students enhance their sense of belonging to their family and country, It can also help them develop their character, improve civilization, and increase their social responsibility. Currently, some English teachers focus excessively on knowledge transmission, neglecting the cultivation of cultural awareness. Consequently, many junior high school students lack understanding of both Chinese and foreign cultures, blindly worshipping Western culture and lacking cultural self-confidence. Textbooks are crucial for students to acquire knowledge and develop cultural awareness. Therefore, in order to cultivate students' cultural awareness, enhance their cultural self-confidence, and improve their cross-cultural communicative competence, the preparation of textbooks and the training of teachers should not only focus on Chinese culture but also include Western culture. Additionally, it is important to mention not only British and American cultures but also those of other non-British and non-American English-speaking countries.

## 2. Purpose and Significance of the Study

### 2.1. Purpose of the Study

This study analyzes Chinese and foreign cultural elements in the PEP English textbook for junior high schools. It explores the distribution characteristics and presentation of Chinese and foreign cultures in the textbook and identifies its advantages and shortcomings in presenting cultural elements. This paper puts forward suggestions for improving the writing of English textbooks and teaching. The aim is to enhance the quality of cultural teaching in junior high schools, and to improve students' cultural awareness, cultural self-confidence, and cross-cultural communication skills.

### 2.2. Significance of the Study

#### 2.2.1. Theoretical Implications

English teaching materials are essential for teaching English. However, the current academic research on Chinese and foreign cultures in the PEP English textbooks for junior high schools is not comprehensive enough. This study aims to enrich the theoretical research on the elements of Chinese and foreign cultures in English teaching materials. At the same time, the findings of this study can provide references for future research on similar teaching materials.

#### 2.2.2. Practical Implications

Teaching English involves not only imparting knowledge of the language, but also helping students understand its grammar and vocabulary. Additionally, language teaching provides an opportunity for students to learn about different cultures around the world, promoting understanding of cultural differences. This can deepen their appreciation of Chinese culture and enhance their cultural and national self-confidence. Junior high school is a crucial stage of compulsory education, as it plays a significant role in the physical and mental development of students. It is also a vital period for students to acquire cultural knowledge and develop a correct outlook on life. Therefore, educators must use this period to guide students in paying attention to both Chinese and foreign cultures, cultivating a strong cultural awareness. Textbooks play a crucial role in this process. This paper analyses the cultural elements present in the English textbooks for junior high schools. It provides suggestions to textbook writers on how to improve the cultural content and offers teaching recommendations to teachers. These suggestions aim to enhance the cultural awareness of junior high school students and promote their all-around development.

## 3. Research Design

### 3.1. Research Questions

Led by the new curriculum standard and aiming at cultivating students' cultural awareness, this paper aims to study the following issues by analyzing the PEP English textbooks for junior high school:

- 1) What characterizes the distribution of Chinese and foreign cultures?
- 2) What characterizes the presentation of culture?

Based on the above questions, recommendations are made for the development of the textbook and for the use of this textbook by teachers.

### 3.2. Subject of the Study

The paper focuses on the English textbook *Go for It*, of which is a set of middle school English textbooks published by People's Education Press. The textbook consists of five volumes, two for each of the seventh and eighth grades, and one for the entire ninth grade, with each volume based on a unit. The first seventh-grade book contains nine units, the second contains twelve,

and each of the first and second eighth-grade books contains ten. The full ninth-grade book contains fourteen units. Each unit comprises two sections: AB and self-check. Part A and Part B mainly consist of exercises and basic language knowledge content. Self-check consolidates and reviews the content of the previous sections. This textbook was selected for analysis because it adheres to the English curriculum standards for compulsory education and impacts a large group of students.

### 3.3. Research Methodology

This study primarily uses text analysis, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. It quantitatively analyses Chinese and foreign cultural elements in the Junior High School English Textbooks of PEP Edition to achieve a deeper understanding of the cultural teaching. The aim of this study is to analyze the distribution of cultural elements in the textbook, identify its strengths and shortcomings, and provide recommendations to the writers and users of the material. The ultimate goal is to enhance students' cultural awareness and cross-cultural communicative competence.

## 4. Findings and Analysis

According to the statistics, the characteristics of the presentation of cultural elements in the PEP English textbooks for junior high schools are shown in the following table:

**Table 1.** Geographical characteristics of cultural distribution in the PEP English textbook *Go for it!*

teaching materials	Chinese culture	Target language culture	Other culture
Seventh Grade Book	1	5	0
Seventh Grade Book	3	1	1
Eighth Grade Book	7	2	1
Eighth Grade Book	11	4	3
Complete ninth grade	9	4	5

**Table 2.** Cultural Presentation of *Go for it!*

teaching materials	unit	Cultural elements	presentation
Seventh Grade Book	Unit 1	Western name calling	text
	Unit 2	Western family titles	text
	Unit 5	soccer ball	text
		ping-pong	Images, text
	Unit 6	Western Food Culture	Images, text
Unit 9	Course Schedule for Western High School Students	text	
Seventh Grade Book	Unit 1	Guitar, piano and other instruments	Images, text
		Table tennis	text
	Unit 5	panda	Images, text
	Unit 10	long-life noodles	Images, text
Unit 12	Rural India	Images, text	
Eighth Grade Book	Unit 1	Guizhou Huangguoshu Waterfalls	Images, text

	Unit 5	Tiananmen Gate, Beijing the Forbidden City in Beijing tarzan Malaysia Little Red Riding Hood Disney (name) Hua Mulan, legendary woman warrior, Northern dynasties folk hero recorded in Sui and Tang literature	photograph photograph writing style writing style photograph Images, text Images, text
	Unit 6	Hemingway, The Old Man and the Sea Yunnan rice vermicelli	text
	Unit 8		Images, text
Eighth Grade Book	Unit 5	Martin Luther King, Jr.	Images, text
	Unit 6	Houyi, mythological Chinese archer whose wife was Chang'e the Monkey King wreaks havoc in the Palace of Heaven (idiom); fig. epics of the Monkey King	photograph photograph
	Unit 7	one of the Chang'e series of PRC lunar spacecraft the old man moves mountains (idiom); fig. where there's a will, there's a way	photograph
	Unit 8	the Emperor's new clothes (i.e. naked)	photograph
	Unit 9	the Great Wall panda Sahara desert Nile (river) Mt Chomolungma or Qomolangma (Tibetan) Little Women. Robinson Crusoe. Hangzhou International Tea Museum figurines of warriors and horses buried with the dead nickname for Beijing 2008 Olympic stadium former imperial palace Singapore Geography	Audio, Image, Text Images, text Images, text Images, text Images, text Images, text Images, text Images, text Images, text Images, text
			Images, text photograph photograph photograph Images, text

All nine grades in one volume	Unit 2	Spring Festival (Chinese New Year)	photograph
		Jiangxi Lantern Festival	photograph
		the Mid-Autumn Festival on 15th of 8th lunar month	Images, text
		the Dragon Boat Festival (5th day of the 5th lunar month)	photograph
		Thailand Water Festival	text
	Unit 5	All Saints (Christian festival)	photograph
		Christmas time	Text
		tea culture	Image, Text
	Unit 8	Kongmingtongue, a traditional Chinese lantern with a hole in the ground	Images, text
	Unit 9	papercutting (Chinese folk art)	
	Unit 10	loam	Images, text
Unit 11	Stone Forest, notable set of limestone formations in Yunnan	Images, text	
	Chinese folk music	photograph	
	Japan, Switzerland, Spain	Images, text	
	April fool's day	copies	
		copies	

The following results can be obtained from the above table:

1) Characteristics of the presentation of Chinese culture

Chinese culture is the culture that appears most frequently in this set of textbooks, with the lowest frequency in the first book of grade 7 and the highest frequency in the second book of grade 8. Traditional Chinese festivals, heroes, history and geography, culture and outstanding artists are all included in this set of textbooks, which is broad and embodies the heritage and essence of Chinese culture. There are many reasons for this. Firstly, Chinese culture is profound and has a long history. Secondly, in the process of learning a language, it is crucial to be able to convey one's own culture in the target language to develop students' ability to "tell a good story about China in English". In order to develop students' ability to convey Chinese culture in English, the first step is to let students understand Chinese culture in English, so as to promote output with input, and the Chinese culture embodied in textbooks can help students to understand the culture of their motherland in depth and strengthen their national and cultural self-confidence.

2) Characteristics of the presentation of foreign cultures

As can be seen from the above table, the foreign cultures in this textbook are mostly native cultures, the cultures of English-speaking countries, mainly Britain and the United States, but less about the cultures of non-native countries, such as India, Thailand and other countries. The foreign cultures presented are not geographically balanced.

## 5. Implications for the Writers of Textbooks

### 5.1. Even Presentation Culture

The content of textbooks should be scientifically organized. However, in this series of textbooks, the intensity of cultural presentation varies greatly, and the content of cultural elements is uneven from one book to another. The first book of Grade 7 is the first semester of junior high school students, and most of them enter the junior high school campus with excitement and eagerness to learn new knowledge. Therefore, this stage is one of the best stages for teaching students culture and enriching their cultural knowledge. However, this set of textbooks has less cultural knowledge in the first book of the seventh grade, which is not conducive to students' cultural learning and cannot satisfy students' needs for cultural knowledge. We should evenly distribute cultural knowledge and reasonably arrange the cultural elements.

### 5.2. Innovative Ways of Presenting Culture

Students in junior high school are curious and willing to accept all kinds of new things, so we should present cultural elements in different ways. From the table above, we can see that the cultures in this textbook are mostly presented in the form of text. With the development of society, we have entered the new media era. As educators in the new era, we must follow the trend of modern information and rely on the multimodal presentation of cultural elements such as text, pictures, audio, video, etc., so that students can perceive the culture from listening, reading and other ways, mobilize students' learning enthusiasm and activate the existing cultural background knowledge so that they can better understand the cultural connotation, and take the initiative to spread and promote the excellent traditional Chinese culture, understand the cultures of other nations and improve cross-cultural communication skills.

### 5.3. Increase in Non-Anglo-American Cultures

In the 21st century, when globalization is developing rapidly and cultural exchanges are accelerating, it is crucial to cultivate students' awareness of intercultural communication. In the past, the developed Western countries have led the international discourse for centuries, exporting and invading cultures to various countries including China, so we are familiar with many Anglo-American cultures. However, with the development of society, many countries, including China, are on the rise. Interculturality is not limited to learning only the cultures of Anglo-American countries, and we must guide our students to broaden their knowledge as much as possible and get in touch with the cultures of different countries. In addition, with the strengthening of China's comprehensive strength, more and more international students choose to come to China to study Chinese, our students can have exchanges with students from different countries, and understanding the cultures of international students' regions can help our students to communicate with international students. Therefore, we can consciously include more cultures of non-target language countries in the process of textbook writing.

## 6. Implications for Teachers' Instruction

### 6.1. Digging Deeper into Cultural Elements

The purpose of language teaching is not only to enable students to master language skills, vocabulary and grammar, but to develop their thinking quality, improve their learning ability and cultural awareness. Teachers should pay attention to cultivating students' cultural awareness, digging into the cultural elements in the textbook and expanding them to increase the breadth and depth, so that students can deeply understand various aspects of culture. The cultural knowledge in this textbook is often presented in an invisible way, and without the teacher's guidance and analysis, it is difficult for students to discover and acquire cultural knowledge. Teachers are the diggers of teaching materials and the leaders of students. As

educators in the new era, teachers should not only stay in the book, but also make use of the teaching materials. We should study the teaching materials in depth according to the students' conditions and scientifically reorganize the cultural element, making up for the inadequacy of the cultural presentation in the textbooks.

## 6.2. Innovative Ways of Teaching Culture

The best way to learn about foreign cultures and cultivate intercultural awareness is to experience and perceive cultures in intercultural contexts. Teachers should adhere to the concept of English learning activities based on teaching materials, let students "learn by doing", use English to solve practical problems, and promote students' active exploration of cultural knowledge, understanding of different cultures and active construction of the system of cross-cultural awareness. In addition, teachers should strive to improve their teaching skills, familiarize themselves with relevant theories of intercultural teaching, apply the theories in practice, flexibly use a variety of cultural teaching methods and fully integrate cultural teaching into the teaching of language knowledge and skills. Teachers should increase their intercultural awareness and sensitivity. Only by familiarizing themselves with the cultures of China and other countries can they accurately and effectively identify the cultural knowledge in the teaching materials and make full use of the teaching materials for cross-cultural teaching.

## 6.3. Focus on Non-Anglo-American Cultures

In the past, when we mentioned globalization and understanding foreign cultures, we mentioned mostly Western Anglo-American cultures. However, with the accelerated development of globalization, many non-Anglo-American countries are slowly rising, and we should also learn about the excellent cultures of non-Anglo-American countries. For example, in the twelfth unit of the seventh grade's book, the article talks about the Indian countryside, which can enrich students' understanding of the geography of the Indian countryside. However, this set of textbooks describes less about the foreign cultures of non-Anglo-American countries, and teachers can supplement them in the teaching process, for example, when talking about Chinese food culture or British and American food culture, teachers can ask students what other countries they know about the food habits. In the eighth unit of the eighth grade's book, the textbook talks about a lot of Chinese and foreign masterpieces, involving *the Little Women*, *Robinson Crusoe*, etc. Books are an important carrier of a country's culture, students can appreciate the local customs and learn the history and culture of the various countries in reading books from different countries and regions.

## 6.4. Emphasizing the Contrast between Chinese and Foreign Cultures

With the help of textbooks, teachers can guide students to compare Chinese and foreign cultures. Even if there is no explicit comparison of cultures in the textbook, teachers can guide students to think about comparing Chinese and foreign cultures by asking questions or in other ways. For example, in the first unit of the first book of the seventh grade, the textbook shows how to introduce one's name when meeting people in Western countries. In British and American countries, the first name comes first and the surname comes second, while in China we are used to the surname coming first and the first name coming second. On this basis, teachers can ask students how Chinese names differ from those in Western countries, leading them to discover the differences between Chinese and Western cultures. For example, in the second unit of the first book of the seventh grade, the aim of the unit is for students to learn to introduce their own family members, and it should be noted that in China there is a distinction between grandpa or grandma, i.e. there are different names for the father's parents and the mother's parents. In Western countries, however, they are referred to collectively as "grandma" or "grandpa". In the process of comparing Chinese and foreign cultures, students can feel the diversity of cultures and learn to appreciate and accept different cultures.

## 6.5. Enhancing Students' Cultural Confidence

In today's world, culture has become a value dimension of economic and social development. As one of the four ancient civilizations, China has a long history and a magnificent culture. Traditional culture is the inexhaustible force of a nation's development and the creativity of civilization. With the accelerated development of globalization, cultural integration is also intensifying, and Western culture is entering China faster and faster. Students are able to say "Merry Christmas" and know Western festivals such as Thanksgiving Day and Christmas, but they have little knowledge of traditional Chinese festivals. Therefore, as educators, we have to take the responsibility of building students' cultural confidence. Enhancing cultural confidence, the first task is to have a full understanding of the excellent traditional Chinese culture, not to blindly worship foreign cultures, in the teaching process, we not only want students to understand foreign cultures, have a global consciousness, but also to let students understand and deeply feel the excellent traditional Chinese culture. For example, in the fifth unit of the first book of seventh grade, the reading board mentions football and table tennis, and table tennis is the national ball of China. Teachers can show students the spirit of Chinese table tennis, the patriotic spirit of competing for the glory of the country, the pragmatic spirit of striving for strength and hard work, to stimulate students' pride in being in China and encourage them to learn from the spirit of the Chinese table tennis team and to work tirelessly both in study and in life, not to be proud of victory and not to be discouraged by defeat. In the second unit of the ninth grade, the reading board talks about the Mid-Autumn Festival and mooncakes. Teachers should explain the origins of the Mid-Autumn Festival, discuss the Chinese people's attachment to their hometowns since ancient times, and promote students' love for their hometowns and motherland.

## 7. Conclusion

The whole set of PEP English textbooks for junior middle schools *Go for it!* basically meets the requirements of the English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education for the cultural content of junior middle school, and fully embodies the cultural value and educational value of teaching materials. However, the distribution of Chinese and foreign cultural elements is uneven, the cultures of non-target languages are relatively few, and the forms of cultural presentation are simple, which is a new thought for the writers and users of this set of teaching materials. Textbook writers should respond to the changes of the times, increase the number of non-target language cultures, innovate the way of presenting cultures. Teachers should make good use of the cultural knowledge in the textbooks, delve deeply into the cultural elements, pay attention to and adapt to the characteristics of the physical and mental development of junior high school students, carry out diversified cultural teaching, mobilize students' initiative and enthusiasm, effectively cultivate students' cultural awareness and cultivate a new generation of successors and transmitters of Chinese culture in the 21st century.

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