

## *Original Paper*

# A Case Study on the Role Models in Chinese Senior High School English Textbooks—The Case of the Textbooks

Published by BNUP in 2019

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Received: July 22, 2023

Accepted: August 27, 2023

Online Published: September 12, 2023

doi:10.22158/eltls.v5n4p64

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/eltls.v5n4p64>

### ***Abstract***

*Moral education has always been an important mission in Chinese education. English textbooks, as one of the vital elements in English teaching, are the main vehicle for transmitting English disciplinary knowledge, and the essential medium for teachers' teaching and students' learning. In fact, the values are often not directly presented in textbooks but are "hidden" in vehicles such as figures and storylines constructed by complex multimodal symbols (Feng, 2015). Therefore, it is essential to explore the images of figures and their values in Chinese English textbooks. This study takes one version of Chinese senior high school English textbooks published by BNUP in 2019 as the research objects. Based on the data collection and thorough analysis, the results show that Chinese senior high school English textbooks published by BNUP emphasize the moral education of students, and the selection of role models is relatively reasonable. Nevertheless, several shortcomings still exist, such as the unbalanced selection of role models in terms of gender and age.*

### ***Keywords***

*Chinese high school English textbooks, role models, case study*

## **1. Introduction**

*The New English Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools (published in 2017 and revised in 2020) put "implementing the fundamental task of establishing moral education and developing core competence in English" in the first place (MOE, 2020), further emphasizing the significance of moral education in the English discipline and the objective of educating people through English discipline. In addition, high school English textbooks are expected to take on the vital task of reflecting and disseminating the mainstream values of society and the national will. Role models, as a significant*

content resource of mainstream social values, play a vital role in educating students. Nevertheless, the existing studies on role models are mostly concentrated on subjects like Chinese, History, and Politics, with little concern for the studies of the role model image and its presentation in English textbooks. Therefore, exploring and studying the role models in senior high school English textbooks is essential. The research significance will be explained in two aspects, for academic study as well as for application in English language teaching and learning.

In terms of theoretical significance, since the existing research seldom elaborates on the analysis of role models in senior high school English textbooks systematically, this research can enrich studies on the specific moral education elements in English textbooks. Second, this study modifies an analysis framework for analyzing the characteristics of role models in high school English textbooks on the basis of previous studies, which provides a relatively new research perspective for future study, so that more researchers' concerns on the study of role model in senior high school English textbooks will be aroused and relative research on it will be enlarged. As for the practical significance, this study can be reflected in two aspects. On the one hand, for textbook writers, this study can provide some suggestions on the selection and presentation of role models in English textbooks. On the other hand, for in-service teachers, this study can help them better understand the images of role models and their presentation ways in English textbooks, which can provide practical suggestions for teachers to better explore and use role models in textbooks for moral education.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1 Research Objects and Research Questions*

In order to figure out the role models in Chinese senior high school English textbooks, this study will analyze one version of English textbooks published by Beijing Normal University Press (BNUP) in 2019. The reasons for choosing are as follows: First of all, English textbooks published by BNUP in 2019 have a wide range of applications and influence in China. Secondly, this version of the textbook was revised and published after the release of the New English curriculum standard, fully reflecting the moral education requirements of English discipline for students. According to the New English Curriculum Standards, the structure of the English curriculum in Chinese senior high schools consists of three types of courses: compulsory, selective compulsory, and selective courses. Accordingly, each version of the English textbook also includes three compulsory books, four selective compulsory books, and three selective books. This study intends to analyze three compulsory textbooks for the reason that the compulsory textbooks are the most representative. Therefore, a total of 3 textbooks will be analyzed in this paper.

This study intends to answer the following questions: 1) What are the features of the image of role models in Chinese senior high school English textbooks? 2) What are the features of the presentation of role models in Chinese senior high school English textbooks?

## 2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

This study focuses on the role models of the textbook, the text analysis method will be used. It is a method of in-depth interpretation of the textbook from the outside to the inside, and a comprehensive analysis of the content of the textbook from multiple perspectives under the full grasp of the textbook (Tang, 2011). The text analysis method can be divided into qualitative analysis and quantitative analysis. This study will use both of them to analyze three textbooks to master role models contained in textbooks.

First, the number of role models in the three senior high school English textbooks will be counted and the recurrence of role models in each version will be counted uniformly in terms of frequency. Second, the images of role models in the three senior high school English textbooks will be labeled and counted according to the analysis framework, including both the external image and the internal image. This part of the analytical framework combines the frameworks of Zhang (2016) as well as Zhang, Zhang and Zhou (2023). The external image consists of the nationality, gender, age, and social identity of role models. The internal image part is the analysis of the moral values of role models, which consists of the classification of four dimensions: personal values, interpersonal values, social values, and national values.

Then, the presentation of role models in the three senior high school English textbooks will also be labeled and counted according to the analysis framework. Afterward, the results are compared and analyzed. Meanwhile, in order to guarantee the research validity and reliability of the study, the data from textbooks are collected and counted twice. Also, the framework used in this study is based on the framework that has been verified and validated by previous researchers.

## 3. Result

The textbooks published by BNUP emphasize the moral education of students through the role models in the textbook, and there are role models of various types, a total of 60 role models are included. For recurring role models, they are counted only once. Role models include famous Chinese and international figures such as Thomas A. Edison, Zhu Geliang, Alfred Tennyson, Mahatma Gandhi, Amelia Earhart, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Maria Sharapova, Cai Yuanpei, Ismeal Esteban, Benjamin Franklin, Edna Ferber, Li Na, Charles Lamb and so on. It also includes some ordinary role models who are closer to students' lives, such as Joe, Li Ying, Zhang Tian, and Wang Ying as well as some whose names are not known.

As far as the nationality of the role models is concerned, the nationalities of the role models selected in the English textbooks are abundant. Among them, the number of role models from China is the largest, with 16, accounting for 26.7% of the total; followed by the number of role models from the United States, with 15, accounting for 25%; the number of role models from the Briton is also larger, with 9, accounting for 15%; the number of role models from Germany and France is equal, with 4, accounting for 6.7%, while the number of role models from other countries is small, for example, India, Spain only

has 3 and 2, accounting for 5% and 3.3%; In addition to this, there are also national role models like Canada, the Netherlands, Norway and South Korea, which together account for 11.6% of the total. It can be seen that senior English textbooks are still dominated by Chinese role models, which reflects the direction of moral education for young people in China to ensure that students' values are in the right direction. In addition, English textbooks have the function of helping students to broaden their international perspective and cultivate cross-cultural awareness, so English textbooks also widely absorb excellent role models from other countries. Detailed information is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. The Nationality of Role Models**

Nationality	China	America	Briton	German	France	India	Spain	Others
Number	16	15	9	4	4	3	2	7
Proportion	26.7%	25%	15%	6.7%	6.7%	5%	3.3%	11.6%

As far as the gender of the role models is concerned, the gender ratio of the role models selected in the senior English textbooks published by BNUP is extremely unbalanced, except for 2 role models whose gender cannot be determined, most of the role models are males, with a total number of 50, accounting for 83.4%, which occupies an absolute dominance, while there are only 8 female role models, accounting for only 13.3%. It can be seen that the selection of the gender of role models in the senior English textbooks published by BNUP is not reasonable, with too many male characters and too few female characters. The number and proportion of male role models are higher than that of female models, which shows that the image of elite figures in various fields in the textbooks is still dominated by men, and the gender bias and stereotype against women still exist, which reflects that the textbook writers pay insufficient attention to the hidden gender discrimination and prejudice in the textbooks. Detailed information is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. The Gender of Role Models**

Gender	Male	Female	Unknown
Number	50	8	2
Proportion	83.4%	13.3%	3.3%

When it comes to the age of the role model, the age ratio of the role models selected is extremely unbalanced, with the vast majority of the role models being adults, totaling 53, accounting for 88.4% of the total, which occupies an absolutely dominant position, while there are only seven role models for minors, accounting for a mere 11.6% of the total. Senior high school students are in an important period of formation of moral values, and adult role models can provide students with a direction for growth and development, so the role models in the textbook are mainly adults. However, English textbooks

should also consider increasing the proportion of peer role models, so that textbooks can be closer to the students' lives. Detailed information is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. The Age of Role Models**

Age	Juvenile	Adult
Number	7	53
Proportion	11.6%	88.4%

When it comes to the occupations of the role models, there is a wide range of occupations of the role models selected in the English textbooks. Among them, the highest number of role models is selected as politicians, with a total of 8, accounting for 13.4%; the number of writers is also high, with a total of 7, accounting for 11.6%; the number of painters and students is the same, with 6 each, accounting for 10% each; and the number of sports players and philosophers is 3 each, accounting for 5% each. The number of painters and students is as high as 6 each, each accounting for 10%, while sports players and philosophers have 3 each, each accounting for 5%. The rest of the occupations are chosen by a smaller number of people, but there are many kinds of occupations, such as poet, teacher or educator, pilot, linguist, engineer, entrepreneur, theoretical physicist, banker, architect, captain and so on. It can be seen that the occupations selected as role models in the senior high school English textbooks published by BNUP are balanced. Detailed information is shown in Table 4.

**Table 4. The Social Identity of Role Models**

Occupations	Politician	Writer	Painter	Student	Sports Player	Philosopher	Others
Number	8	7	6	6	3	3	27
Proportion	13.4%	11.6%	10%	10%	5%	5%	45%

As far as the moral values conveyed by role models are concerned, they are found in the personal, interpersonal, social, and national dimensions, with the highest number of personal values (36 in total, or 60%), followed by social values (12 in total, or 20%), and an equal number of interpersonal and national values (6 each, or 10% each). Among Personal Value, Persistence and Loving and pursuing beauty and art were the most numerous, with 8 each; Hardworking attitude, Loving study, Interest in hobbies, and Respect and honor science were the next most numerous, with 4 each; Diligence and frugality, Sincerity and braveness, and Cherishing life and keeping healthy were also involved, but with smaller numbers of 1 or 2 each. Interpersonal Value possesses the highest number of Loving families, with three, followed by Solidarity and friendship, Being civilized and polite, and Friendly with the neighborhood, each with one, but fewer; Social Value has all the role models in Environment-friendly;

National Value possesses Loving hometown, country, and army; Sacrifice and Love-friendly. In Interpersonal Value, Loving family has the highest number with 3, followed by Solidarity and friendship, Being civilized and polite, and Friendly with the neighborhood, with only 1 each; in Social Value, all role models are concentrated in Environment-friendly; in National Value, Loving hometown, country, and army; Sacrifice and Love of Peace are all involved, with more or less equal numbers. The number of these two topics is relatively equal. It can be seen that the values of role models in high school English textbooks are mainly personal values, but all four dimensions are involved. Detailed information is shown in Table 5.

**Table 5. The Moral Value of Role Models**

Moral Value	Personal Value	Interpersonal Value	Social Value	National Value
Number	36	6	12	6
Proportion	60%	10%	20%	10%

As far as the presentation forms of role models are concerned, role models are mostly presented directly in the form of discourse, with a total of 37, accounting for 61.6%, while the rest are presented in the form of Multiple ways, of which the combination of illustrations and discourse is the most frequent, with 13, followed by the combination of illustrations, discourse and activities, with 5. The combination of discourse and activities, as well as the combination of illustrations and activities are presented in fewer ways, 2 and 3 respectively. It can be seen that discourse is the main way of presenting role models in English textbooks, whether they are presented in a single discourse or in various combinations of ways. Detailed information is shown in Table 6.

**Table 6. The Presentation of Role Models**

Presentation	Discourse	Illustration	Activity	Multiple Ways
Number	37	0	0	23
Proportion	61.6%	0	0	38.4%

#### 4. Discussion

Senior high school English textbooks published by BNUP emphasize the moral education of students, and the selection of role models is relatively reasonable. Firstly, in terms of the nationality of the role models, Chinese role models are predominantly chosen, and role models from different countries are also selected to help students expand their international horizons. Secondly, the moral values conveyed by the role models contain four dimensions: personal, interpersonal, social, and national, which are quite comprehensive; at the same time, the occupations of the role models are rich. Moreover, the

presentation of the role models is reasonable. Mainly based on the discourse, and the various ways are presented together, which ensures the richness of the presentation of the role models. Nevertheless, the study shows that the selection of role models still possesses certain shortcomings, such as the extremely unbalanced selection of role models by gender, with a higher number of male role models than that of female role models. At the same time, the age ratio of the role models is not reasonable enough, and the number of role models for minors is not selected in sufficient numbers.

### Acknowledgement

This paper was done independently, but the content idea and writing process of the paper were assisted by my graduate English language teaching course Teacher Ms. Ao. In the English language teaching course, Ms. Ao often shared high-quality core journals with us, which assisted me in expanding my academic horizons. It was also the core journals she shared that gave me support in choosing a topic to determine the title of this paper. At the same time, in the process of writing this paper, Ms. Ao repeatedly deepened the detailed discussion with me on various core issues in the paper, and gave me practical guiding suggestions. Therefore, please allow me to express my sincere appreciation to the respected Ms. Ao! In addition, I also want to express my gratitude to my parents who have always supported me in my studies and in my life. They are not only my family, but also my friends, and it is they who encourage me when I am disillusioned, and support me when I am lost. I appreciate my parents for being with me all the way through the road of life! Last but not least, I also would like to express my sincere appreciation to my close friends for their encouragement and companionship during the writing of my paper. At the same time, they have also suggested me accordingly for my paper writing, therefore I would like to express my sincere gratitude to them as well.

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