

Original Paper

Research on the Presentation and Optimization Strategies of Chinese Cultural Elements in College English Textbooks

Runhui Wang^{1*}

¹ School of Foreign Language, Hubei University of Technology, Wuhan, China

* Corresponding author

Received: June 16, 2026

Accepted: July 10, 2026

Online Published: July 20, 2026

doi:10.22158/jecs.v10n3p20

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/jecs.v10n3p20>

Abstract

Against the backdrop of national cultural development and curriculum-based ideological and political education, college English textbooks bear dual missions of language instruction and international communication of Chinese culture. This paper takes full sets of freshman and sophomore general college English textbooks from mainstream domestic publishers as qualitative research samples. Guided by Culturally Responsive Teaching theory and Byram's nine-theme textbook evaluation framework, this study adopts documentary research and qualitative text categorization to analyze three tiers of Chinese cultural materials. The text sorting reveals three core defects: Western cultural contents dominate textbooks, three categories of Chinese culture are unevenly distributed, and listening-reading input tasks are disconnected from oral-writing output exercises. Rooted in textbook compilation concepts, single assessment standards and insufficient teachers' cultural literacy, this paper constructs a three-dimensional improvement system. Balancing cultural proportions, enriching multi-level cultural themes and designing targeted output tasks can maximize textbooks' cultural education value. Distinct from previous macroscopic discussions lacking textual verification, this study provides operable suggestions for textbook revision and school-based teaching material development.

Keywords

Cultural Confidence, Chinese Cultural Elements, College English Textbooks, Cultural Presentation, Teaching Optimization Strategies

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Based on the national strategic layout of building a culturally powerful country and promoting curriculum-based ideological and political education, China has issued a series of policies to boost

traditional cultural inheritance and standardized textbook construction. The Guidelines for College English Teaching (2020 Edition) clarifies the dual instrumental and humanistic attributes of college English, requiring textbooks to integrate Chinese culture to cultivate students' cultural confidence and facilitate global Chinese cultural communication (Jin, 2025). Under such policy guidance, optimizing the arrangement of Chinese cultural materials has become a core reform direction for university foreign language curricula (Li et al., 2024).

For a long time, college English teaching relied on one-way input of Western culture, an educational model that has triggered widespread academic reflection. Text sorting of mainstream textbooks shows Western literary and custom-related articles occupy most space, while contents covering fine traditional Chinese culture, revolutionary culture and advanced socialist culture are scattered and insufficient (Ma, 2019).

The long-term deficiency of Chinese cultural materials in textbooks is a primary cause of students' weak competence to interpret China in English. Most undergraduates can elaborate Western festivals and pop culture, yet fail to explain traditional philosophy, intangible heritage and modern national achievements in cross-cultural communication (Fu, 2019). In view of policy demands, classroom realities and existing teaching dilemmas, this paper centers on Chinese cultural elements in college English textbooks to analyze practical problems and corresponding solutions. However, most existing studies only put forward general suggestions without refined textual classification based on the three-tier Chinese cultural system, which creates the core research gap of this paper.

1.2 Research Significance

1.2.1 Theoretical Significance

Supported by Byram's cross-cultural evaluation system and Culturally Responsive Teaching theory, this study expands existing cross-cultural teaching research (Zhang & Yu, 2020). It establishes unified classification criteria for three tiers of Chinese cultural contents in English textbooks and perfects the qualitative textual analysis framework. The research remedies the limitation of prior studies that only describe phenomena without systematic improvement frameworks, enriching interdisciplinary achievements combining cultural confidence and college English education, and offering standardized analytical paradigms for similar textbook research.

1.2.2 Practical Significance

This study delivers multi-layer practical value. For textbook compilers, its improvement schemes can be applied to new textbook revisions and school-based supplementary materials to balance Chinese-Western cultural proportions (Li et al., 2024). For frontline college English teachers, the research conclusions can guide in-class Chinese-Western cultural comparative teaching and after-class cultural expansion. For students, optimized textbook contents can mitigate their insufficient Chinese cultural expression capacity, enrich English expression reserves of domestic civilization and strengthen cross-cultural communication identity.

1.3 Research Questions

What are the presentation rules and distribution features of Chinese cultural elements in mainstream general college English textbooks in China?

What prominent flaws exist in textbook cultural material selection, structural layout and content presentation, and what are their deep-seated root causes?

From the perspective of cultural confidence cultivation, how to optimize the presentation modes of Chinese cultural elements in college English textbooks?

2. Literature Review and Definition of Core Concepts

2.1 Domestic and Foreign Research Status

Foreign scholars launched early research on cultural embedding in foreign language textbooks and formed mature theoretical systems. Byram built the evaluation framework of intercultural communicative competence, proposing that foreign language textbooks need to coordinate native and target cultural proportions, which provides classical theoretical support for textbook textual analysis (Zhang & Yu, 2020). Kramsch advanced the language-culture symbiosis theory, holding that language cannot be taught separated from cultural context, and learners' domestic cultural cognition serves as the foundation to understand foreign civilizations. Cortazzi & Jin further pointed out that long-term absence of native culture in textbooks will weaken students' national cultural identity from the perspective of learner identity construction.

Comment: Western theories form complete evaluation logic, yet they lack classification standards matching China's three-tier cultural system, so they cannot be directly applied to domestic textbook research without localization adjustment.

After the formation of foreign theoretical frameworks, domestic academia developed three mainstream research branches targeting local college English teaching realities.

First, research focusing on the phenomenon of insufficient Chinese cultural expression in English teaching. Since Cong first proposed the concept of cultural aphasia, Fu (2019) has sorted years of relevant papers and verified the structural bias of prioritizing Western culture over domestic culture in English classrooms.

Comment: Such research accurately identifies teaching dilemmas but lacks detailed textual analysis of real textbook contents.

Second, research on textbook text inspection. Through close reading of multiple textbook sets, Ma (2019) and Li et al. (2024) confirmed the unbalanced Chinese-Western content ratio and fragmentation of domestic cultural materials.

Comment: Existing textual research only roughly distinguishes Chinese and Western contents, without subdividing three tiers of Chinese culture for comparative analysis.

Third, curriculum reform research based on cultural confidence and ideological education. Jin (2025) and Xu & Shuai (2020) explored integration paths from classroom, faculty and evaluation dimensions.

Comment: Relevant countermeasures remain macroscopic without targeted operations matched to textbook compilation.

A comprehensive review of domestic literature reveals most existing papers only present general arguments and superficial countermeasures. Few scholars conduct refined qualitative text analysis combining the three-tier Chinese cultural standard and dig deep into multi-dimensional root causes. This paper fills this research blank and supplements targeted empirical analysis for this field.

2.2 Definition of Core Concepts

2.2.1 Cultural Confidence

Cultural confidence refers to a country and nation's self-recognition and firm belief in the lasting vitality of its own civilization, covering fine traditional Chinese culture, revolutionary culture and advanced socialist culture, with connotations including cultural identity, inheritance and innovative development (Fu, 2020). Within college English teaching, it is not merely a spiritual recognition, but embodied as learners' practical competence to interpret China equally and appropriately in English during cross-cultural communication, which acts as the core value standard running through all textual analysis of this paper.

2.2.2 Chinese Cultural Elements

Chinese cultural elements refer to all texts, images and symbolic materials carrying Chinese cultural connotations and suitable for college English teaching practice (Zhang & Yu, 2020). The scope covers traditional festivals, cuisine, painting, architecture, classical philosophy and literary works, as well as modern scientific achievements, new-era social customs and mainstream values, fully corresponding to the three-tier Chinese cultural classification standard adopted in this paper. This unified definition serves as the core marking standard when sorting textbook materials in Chapter 5.

2.2.3 Cultural Presentation of Textbooks

Cultural presentation of textbooks refers to the complete compilation logic and educational effect formed by screening, arranging and transmitting cultural materials through textbook units, dialogues, after-class exercises and audio-visual attachments (Ma, 2019). Specific observation indicators include Chinese-Western content ratio, thematic preference, material distribution across different learning modules and design of oral & written output assignments. All above indicators constitute the core observation dimensions of the qualitative text sorting in this research.

Based on the above literature combing and conceptual definition, this paper introduces two classical theoretical frameworks to support the textbook text analysis and countermeasure construction in subsequent chapters.

3. Theoretical Basis

3.1 Culturally Responsive Teaching Theory

Originating from multicultural education research, Culturally Responsive Teaching theory advocates that teaching activities should respect learners' native cultural backgrounds and take domestic civilization as

a bridge for absorbing foreign language knowledge, matching teaching contents with students' existing cognitive experience to strengthen cultural identity (Ma, 2019). In foreign language education, the theory rejects one-way indoctrination of target culture and promotes balanced integration of native and foreign cultural materials. If textbooks lack sufficient Chinese cultural contents, students will passively accept Western values and easily form cultural dependency and inferiority. In contrast, balanced embedding of domestic cultural articles allows students to compare civilizations objectively and consolidate their cultural stance, fundamentally alleviating insufficient Chinese cultural expression capacity.

This theory serves as the core theoretical basis for analyzing cultural imbalance and students' cultural inferiority described in Chapter 5.

3.2 Byram's Evaluation Criteria for Textbook Culture

As a leading scholar in intercultural foreign language education, Byram constructed a quantifiable and operable evaluation framework, dividing all cultural textbook materials into nine themes: social groups, communication modes, beliefs and customs, social institutions, socialization, national history, geography, cultural heritage and cultural stereotypes (Zhang & Yu, 2020). The system covers superficial folk customs and deep national values, widely adopted as a reference for domestic textbook research. In this paper, all Chinese cultural elements extracted from selected textbooks are categorized into Byram's nine themes to conduct horizontal comparison of Chinese-Western material distribution bias. Classification based on this mature framework standardizes text sorting and avoids subjective judgment in subsequent problem analysis.

This nine-theme classification system is the core coding tool adopted for all textbook textual sorting in Chapter 5.

The two theoretical frameworks above form the complete analytical logic of this paper. The fourth chapter will clarify research samples and qualitative methods before launching systematic textbook text analysis.

4. Research Design

4.1 Research Objects

This study selects four sets of mainstream general college English textbooks published by China's top foreign language presses, including reading-writing and listening-speaking volumes for Grade 1 and Grade 2 undergraduates. Niche school-based textbooks and discipline-specific English textbooks are excluded to eliminate sample deviation and guarantee the research conclusions fit most comprehensive university teaching scenarios. All selected textbooks are widely adopted across domestic universities, ensuring universal representativeness of the textual analysis results.

4.2 Research Methods

This paper only adopts two qualitative research methods without any quantitative statistics, questionnaires or classroom experiments. Documentary research and textual categorization complement each other to standardize research procedures and ensure objective analysis conclusions.

4.2.1 Text Analysis

Guided by Byram's nine cultural themes and the three-tier Chinese cultural standard, this paper sorts textbook units, exercises, classroom tasks and audio materials item by item. Researchers mark the cultural category and affiliated learning module of each Chinese cultural fragment, then conduct qualitative comparison of Chinese-Western layout differences. This method can objectively restore the original compilation logic of textbooks and match the text-centered positioning of this research. The complete coding operation rule: distinguish input modules (reading, listening) and output modules (speaking, writing) and record the quantity difference of Chinese cultural materials in each module.

To make the qualitative coding rules transparent and verifiable, this paper provides complete sample coding cases of textbook excerpts. All textbook passages are labeled under four fixed dimensions: three-tier indigenous cultural type, Byram's nine cultural themes, learning module type (input/output), and corresponding textbook drawbacks.

Sample 1 Single Chinese Cultural Text Coding

Source: New College English Volume 2, Unit 6 Text title: High-speed Rail: The Symbol of Modern China

Word count: 712 words Teaching arrangement: Only reading passage, no follow-up speaking or writing homework Coding labels:

1. Three-tier Chinese culture: Advanced Socialist Culture
2. Byram's theme categories: National historical context, National cultural heritage
3. Module type: Input Module
4. Reflected textbook defect: Materials introducing contemporary national development are rare, without matched output training tasks.

Sample 2 Chinese vs Western Text Comparative Coding

Same unit: New College English Volume 1, Unit 2

Western text: Christmas Customs, around 890 words, with group oral discussion exercise Coding: Western folk culture; Beliefs and customs; Input + Output Module Chinese attached text: Spring Festival Brief Introduction, only 106 words, no output exercises Coding: Fine Traditional Chinese Culture; Beliefs and customs; Input Module

Comparative conclusion: The textbook arranges far more space for Western culture and supports output practice, while indigenous cultural content is fragmented and lacks output links.

4.2.2 Documentary Research

This paper systematically retrieves academic papers and official teaching documents concerning cultural confidence, college textbook construction and Chinese cultural aphasia. On the one hand, it extracts two core theories to build the overall analytical framework; on the other hand, it sorts the strengths and defects of existing research to confirm the unique research entry point of this paper and consolidate theoretical foundations.

5. Current Situation and Deficiencies of Chinese Cultural Elements in College English Textbooks

5.1 Objective Presentation Situation

From the overall compilation perspective of selected textbooks, Western social, literary and custom articles occupy the dominant proportion of unit texts, while systematic chapters introducing Chinese philosophy, traditional crafts and modern national development are extremely scarce. This unbalanced content ratio forms a single target-culture input mode that prevents students from forming objective cross-cultural cognition. In short, Western cultural materials occupy an absolute dominant position in textbook reading modules. A comparative coding case can verify such unbalanced layout. In Unit 2 of New College English Volume One, the article Christmas Customs occupies nearly 900 words and is equipped with oral discussion tasks, while the supplementary passage about Spring Festival merely contains 106 words without any output design. Such coding comparison intuitively reflects that textbooks allocate more space to Western cultural resources. This imbalance fully echoes the core standpoint of Culturally Responsive Teaching, which holds that lopsided cultural input will impede students' construction of indigenous cultural identity. Meanwhile, this unequal allocation of cultural texts can be categorized under Byram's theme of Beliefs and customs, which intuitively reflects the biased cultural selection logic of textbook compilers.

In terms of module distribution, indigenous cultural fragments are highly concentrated on reading and listening input sections, while vocabulary, oral presentation and writing exercises barely contain domestic cultural contents. Cultural learning knowledge and language skill training are completely disconnected; textbooks rarely design discussion or composition tasks themed on indigenous civilization. Indigenous cultural resources lack matched output training carriers in language practice links. The coding result of the high-speed rail text also illustrates this defect. The reading material High-speed Rail: The Symbol of Modern China only belongs to the input module, and no matching writing or speaking assignments are designed for students to express relevant views independently. From the perspective of Culturally Responsive Teaching, learning only receptive input materials without corresponding output tasks cannot realize the internalization of cultural cognition. In line with Byram's evaluation system, qualified cultural teaching materials ought to match knowledge input with communicative output activities to cultivate students' cross-cultural expression competence.

In thematic selection, indigenous textbook materials are limited to superficial tangible symbols such as traditional festivals, food and ancient buildings, with extremely scarce revolutionary culture and advanced socialist culture materials. Articles covering traditional ideology, national history, cutting-edge technology and new-era development are nearly absent. Indigenous cultural categories show extremely uneven distribution across textbook contents. Statistics after coding show that among all Chinese cultural passages, most belong to fine traditional culture such as food and festivals, while revolutionary culture and advanced socialist culture only account for a tiny proportion of the whole textbook content. This uneven distribution of three-tier indigenous cultural materials violates the diversified cultural cultivation requirement of Culturally Responsive Teaching. Under Byram's theme classification, revolutionary

culture and advanced socialist culture correspond to National historical context and National cultural heritage, two indispensable dimensions missing in most textbook contents.

In presentation forms, textbooks mostly adopt descriptive narrative passages for cultural input, without open tasks including cultural speeches, civilization comparison discussions and story creation. Students can comprehend indigenous cultural texts through reading and listening, yet lack chances to organize independent English expressions. Most cultural passages only realize one-way knowledge input without interactive tasks guiding comparative critical thinking. The single input mode cannot convert cultural knowledge into practical linguistic competence. The one-way descriptive reading design fails to provide interactive cultural practice space for students, which conflicts with the student-centered educational concept of Culturally Responsive Teaching. Byram's framework emphasizes that cultural teaching should involve comparative discussion and independent expression tasks rather than passive reading only.

5.2 Derived Educational Problems

First, long-term imbalance between Chinese and Western contents weakens students' native cultural identity. Continuous exposure to massive Western materials without domestic cultural nourishment easily breeds cultural dependency and inferiority, which is the core inducement of students' poor ability to introduce China in English (Fu, 2019). This directly conflicts with the balanced educational logic of Culturally Responsive Teaching theory. Most students are familiar with Western entertainment and festivals but cannot interpret Chinese intangible heritage and traditional philosophy in cross-cultural communication.

Second, fragmented superficial folk symbols replace systematic domestic cultural contents. Students only memorize scattered cultural labels without integrated cognition of Chinese civilization, failing to achieve the ideological education goal of cultivating cultural confidence and telling Chinese stories in English (Jin, 2025).

Third, separation between input and output modules hinders the transformation of cultural knowledge into linguistic competence. Even after reading Chinese cultural passages, students have no matching oral and writing training opportunities, so their cross-cultural output weakness cannot be alleviated fundamentally.

5.3 Multi-dimensional Root Causes

First of all, textbook compilation concepts have long prioritized linguistic knowledge points and Western cultural context, ignoring the humanistic cultural education goal. This biased orientation directly causes unbalanced Chinese-Western proportions and the scarcity of revolutionary & modern cultural materials, resulting in superficial, single domestic cultural themes (Li et al., 2024).

Secondly, college English assessment systems take vocabulary, grammar and written test scores as core evaluation indicators, without setting scoring standards for Chinese cultural expression. Low practical demand from teaching and assessment reduces the internal motivation for textbook cultural optimization, leading to thin domestic cultural contents and disconnected output exercises.

Furthermore, many college English teachers lack systematic reserves of Chinese civilization knowledge

and mature bilingual transformation capacity. Even if textbooks contain limited Chinese cultural materials, teachers cannot launch extended cultural lectures and interactive training, further magnifying the inherent defects of textbooks (Jin, 2025). All above conflicts with the balanced educational proposition of Culturally Responsive Teaching theory.

6. Optimization Strategies from the Perspective of Cultural Confidence

6.1 Textbook Compilation Optimization

Compilers need to adjust the overall textbook structural framework from the source to raise the proportion of Chinese cultural materials and balance Chinese-Western content layout (Li et al., 2024). While retaining folk custom materials, compilers supplement contents covering Chinese history, philosophy, social institutions, scientific innovation and ecological civilization to build an integrated cultural system combining ancient traditions and modern achievements.

Textbooks should break the limitation of only placing Chinese culture in reading and listening modules, embedding domestic cultural fragments in vocabulary, oral and writing exercises to integrate cultural cognition and language training. Besides descriptive reading passages, compilers need to add output tasks including cultural speeches, Sino-Western comparative comments and cultural creation projects. Independent thematic units classified into traditional, revolutionary and modern Chinese culture can be set with matched oral & writing assignments based on Byram's nine-theme framework.

Applicable scenario: This overall compilation scheme fits new textbook revision and school-based supplementary handout development.

6.2 Classroom Teaching and Faculty Construction

Insufficient teachers' cultural literacy amplifies textbook inherent defects. As core implementers of cultural education, teachers' domestic cultural reserves and bilingual capacity directly determine the effect of cultural confidence cultivation. Universities and foreign language teaching research offices should organize regular training on Chinese civilization and bilingual expression to strengthen teachers' initiative of integrating domestic culture into daily classes (Jin, 2025).

Restricted by the long revision cycle of official textbooks, teachers can supplement timely domestic cultural materials about aerospace projects and rural revitalization, matching unit themes to organize group discussions and in-class presentations. Regular activities including "Telling Chinese Stories in English" and cross-cultural comparative seminars can create immersive communication environments to mitigate students' cultural expression weakness.

Applicable scenario: All interactive teaching designs can be implemented in daily college English classrooms and regular teaching research seminars.

6.3 Reform of Course Evaluation Mechanisms

Single language-centered evaluation standards form institutional barriers for Chinese cultural teaching. Perfected multi-dimensional assessment serves as long-term guarantee for cultural education. Traditional evaluation only focuses on linguistic indicators and cannot drive students to accumulate domestic cultural

knowledge. Universities need to reconstruct comprehensive evaluation frameworks, incorporating cultural comprehension depth, oral Chinese cultural presentation and cross-cultural critical thinking into usual performance, stage quizzes and final exams via thematic composition and oral report assignments (Xu & Shuai, 2020). Adjusted evaluation standards deliver balanced cross-cultural education orientation, guiding students to develop linguistic competence and cultural literacy simultaneously, consistent with the core logic of Culturally Responsive Teaching theory.

Applicable scenario: The multi-dimensional evaluation standard can be integrated into official college English curriculum assessment documents of universities.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Core Research Findings

Qualitative textual categorization of mainstream college English textbooks shows three prominent defects: Western cultural materials occupy dominant positions, three tiers of Chinese culture are unevenly distributed, and input learning modules are disconnected from oral-writing output tasks. The root causes lie in biased textbook compilation concepts, single linguistic-oriented assessment standards and insufficient teachers' domestic cultural literacy. Only synchronous optimization of textbook contents, classroom teaching design and course evaluation systems can fully realize the cultural education function of college English textbooks.

7.2 Research Innovations

Different from previous macroscopic argumentative papers without textual verification, this study combines Byram's nine-theme framework and three-tier Chinese cultural classification standard to conduct refined qualitative textbook analysis. It systematically analyzes problems and multi-dimensional root causes, constructing a three-in-one optimization system covering textbooks, classrooms and evaluation, filling the research blank of prior studies lacking targeted operable improvement schemes matched to real textbook texts.

7.3 Research Limitations and Future Prospects

Restricted by research conditions, this paper only adopts pure qualitative textual categorization without questionnaires, teacher-student interviews or classroom action research, so the practical implementation effect of the proposed optimization strategies still needs further verification. Follow-up research can expand the scope of textbook samples, combine multi-source qualitative materials including teacher and student interviews, and continuously explore long-term sustainable paths for integrating Chinese cultural elements into college English textbooks.

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