

## A study on cultural identity in the textbooks of an intercultural communication course

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**Abstract.** In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the effects of cultural factors on cultural identity in the field of teaching Chinese as a foreign language. The central issues include the kind of knowledge structure and value orientations involved in Chinese teaching and Chinese textbooks, the responsibility teachers take when educating people, and ways of further optimizing and improving the quality of education. This paper reports a study exploring the cultural factors in a course of intercultural communication offered to Chinese language majors at a university in Beijing. The researchers followed the students in this course for four months, from September to December of 2021. The researchers analyzed the value orientations of the course textbook *Boya Chinese* and the ways of using the textbook in classroom teaching. The purpose was to identify the basic characteristics and existing problems of the textbook and its relationship with language teaching. Through data analysis, four dimensions of cultural identity were identified. It is suggested that through strengthening the blended mode of online and offline teaching, teachers can help students understand and appreciate the Chinese culture and language so as to build a community with a shared future for mankind.

**Keywords:** cultural identity, cross-cultural communication, *Boya Chinese*, field analysis.

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the influence of cultural factors on cultural identity has received increasing attention in teaching Chinese as a second language (Sun, 2021). Cultural identity is a sense of group cultural identity and a sense that an individual is influenced by group culture. Many researchers have studied the cultural factors of foreign Chinese teaching materials (e.g. Chen, 2022; Du, 2021; Luo, 2022; Xu, 2013). There is not enough awareness of the knowledge structures and value orientations involved in language teaching and materials and the responsibilities they assume (Bai & Zhang, 2022).

The purpose of this study is to clarify the basic characteristics of the Chinese textbook *Boya Chinese*, identify the problems, and seek possible solutions in relation to Chinese language teaching and learning. The research questions are as follows.

- (1) What are the cultural identities presented in the course textbook of ‘Intercultural Communication’?
- (2) What are the characteristics of the students’ cultural identities?
- (3) How can the teacher integrate cultural identities presented in the materials through teaching?
- (4) How can the teacher integrate students’ identities through teaching?

## 2. Method

This study was conducted in a second-year core course ‘Intercultural Communication’ offered to the Chinese language majors at a university in Beijing. Data included a questionnaire survey, classroom observations, eight semi-structured interviews, and the textbook of the course.

The questionnaire method is a four-month follow-up survey around online teaching in the fall semester of 2021-2022; 100 questionnaires were collected and the results were analyzed using SPSS. The interviews were conducted from September to December 2021 with eight international students in a one-hour interview each.

### 3. Data analysis and discussion

#### 3.1. Cultural identity revealed in the textbook

##### 3.1.1. Theme

The analysis of themes is divided into political, social and cultural, historical and geographical, moral and quality, economic and commercial, science and technology, and environmental protection (Wang, 2021). There are 16 topics in the textbook *Boya Chinese* (Intermediate I, Table 1, Li, 2012).

Table 1. Thematic education categories in *Boya Chinese*

	Moral category (2)	Socio-cultural category (9)	Science and technology category (3)	History and Geography Class (2)
Boya Chinese (Intermediate)	Love Rose	Three E-mails	Children learning language	Sun Yat-sen
	Your husband is so nice.	Diary	Color and personality	Wu Zetian
		Study Abroad in China	What should be done	
		Is she our daughter?		
		Recordings		
		Music and Neighborhood Girls		
		Eat in China		
		Treating guests to dinner		
		National superstitions		

##### 3.1.2. Character image

The characters in the textbook present their own viewpoints (Sun, 2021). For example, the description of the characters of Sun Yat-sen and Wu Zetian in the textbook, which implies the language, behavior, and intercultural communication functions. Through the interactions using the characters, intercultural

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communication problems are highlighted and their intercultural communication skills are cultivated.

### 3.1.3. Geographical distribution

Bourdieu and other researchers argue that all human activities take place in different socially constructed fields (Bourdieu & Wang, 1995). Different localization has different cultural capital, which leads people to compete and chase each other. They accumulate capital continuously, in order to maximize their own social advantages.

The analysis shows that the textbook showed the spiritual outlook of China's big cities from texts such as 'Eat in China' and 'Study in China', which changed their stereotypes.

### 3.1.4. Cultural factors

This study uses the database statistical model to investigate the texts with Chinese cultural factors in the book. Among them, the overall presentation of cultural factors can be divided into eight parts, accounting for more than half of the total number of courses (Table 2). Also, there are Chinese cultural factors in 43 classes.

Table 2. Cultural factors in *Boya Chinese*

Broad categories of cultural factors	Cultural Factors Subcategory	Occurrence Number	Expression of cultural factors
Geographical overview	City Introduction	10	Harbin, Beijing, Xi'an, Xi'an, Xiangshan, Macau, Guangzhou, Wuxi, Suzhou, Hangzhou, Liuzhou
	Places of interest	3	Great Wall, Forbidden City, Terracotta Warriors, Horses of Qin Shi Huang
	River	2	Yellow River, Yangtze River
	Natural Scenery	1	Mount Tai
	Special building	1	Temple
Diet	Special Diet	2	Sweet and Sour Pork, Tofu
Interpersonal	Appellation	5	Boss, husband, leader, elder sister, brother-in-law
Modern Life	Daily Life	1	Big Stall
People Events	Historical figures	5	Sun Yat-sen, Wu Zetian, Emperor Taizong of Tang, Emperor Gaozong of Tang, Empress Wang

Country Profile	Administrative Area History	5	Northeast, Guangdong, Shaanxi, Sichuan, County
		3	Qing Dynasty, Republic of China, Tang Dynasty
Literary Arts	Idiom	2	Exactly the same, follow the local customs
Language and Literature	Language	3	Mandarin, dialect, native language

### 3.1.5. *Characteristics of students' cultural identity*

The questionnaire shows that 93.4% of the international students are satisfied with the distribution of the topics in the textbook, which contains Chinese traditional culture, 97.5% of the international students said that they had a deep understanding of Chinese traditional culture through the characters of Sun Yat-sen and Wu Zetian, and 55.7% of the international students studied the characters and went to the traditional Chinese cultural places involved in the characters; 92% of the international students visited the Forbidden City in Beijing, and 56% of them visited the cities mentioned in the text.

Seven of the eight international students said in the in-depth interview that, of the cultural factors, they were most interested in Chinese food culture and had an admiration for historical celebrities. More than 80% of them said they did not know much about the national conditions. They also did not particularly understand the wording of interpersonal communication.

## 3.2. **Integration of the cultural identity of the textbook and the students' cultural identities**

Teachers create a positive atmosphere for teaching to effectively integrate the cultural identity of the material with the cultural identity of the students.

First of all, for teachers, they should constantly improve their own learning. Secondly, they should use teaching to enhance students' values and students' cultural safety awareness as well.

In terms of teaching materials, we should pay attention to the integration of educational objectives and teaching materials, rationally compare the differences between the East and the West in teaching materials, and actively put forward suggestions for reform and innovation.

## 4. Conclusions

In this study, the researchers explored cultural identity and identification in the course textbook of 'Intercultural Communication'. It is suggested that the role of culture be given full play to promote the acquisition of Chinese skills, the learning of verbal knowledge, and the strengthening of thinking and political awareness to a high degree of intermingling, so that international students can become narrators of Chinese stories, enhance their personality to integrate ideological political education into education.

The inspiration for teaching is, firstly, to improve the educational objectives; secondly, to pay attention to the integration of text selection and educational objectives; thirdly, to improve teachers' abilities to educate people and consciously strengthen the leadership and cultivation of students' values; and fourthly, to improve international students' abilities to analyze, identify, and criticize foreign Chinese textbooks independently.

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