Exoticism of the *Other*: (Mis)representations of Culture in English Textbooks in Korea

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This study investigates the social construction and continual (re)production of the cultural *Other* through educational materials, focusing on Korean middle school English textbooks. Twelve middle school English textbooks from four publishers were collected and analyzed, with a focus on how they (mis)represent cultures and practices of minority groups. Utilizing critical content analysis to examine both visual and written texts in the textbooks, this research uncovers recurring patterns of exoticizing and commodifying Hawai'ian culture, homogenizing African culture, and romanticizing Indigenous peoples. The findings contribute significantly to our understanding of how cultural representations in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks shape perceptions and influence societal dynamics. They also illuminate how these representations reflect and perpetuate Eurocentric colonialist discourse. Moreover, the results underscore the importance of equipping educators, especially English teachers, with critical literacy. This empowers them to identify hidden power relations that reinforce stereotypes, and actively engage in the construction of a more inclusive and equitable society.

Keywords: *Self-Other*, English textbooks, exoticism, critical content analysis, critical literacy

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language and culture are intricately intertwined, making it inevitable that language learners, whether in classroom setting or elsewhere, are exposed to various cultures as they learn a new language. During this cultural exposure, learners come across both familiar and entirely new and different cultures. Some learners may not fully connect these cultural encounters with their own lives, often dismissing them as *Other* (Palfreyman, 2005; Said, 1978; Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor, 2014), which is briefly defined as "the ways in which an individual or a particular group of people is objectified, differentiated, simplified, exotified, or created in position to the *Self*" (Linares, 2016, p. 131). If language learners place excessive emphasis on cultural differences, they may, consciously or unconsciously, perceive their own culture as the standard against which they judge other cultures, often labeling them as strange or exotic (Bennet, 2017). This tendency to view others as strange or different can lead to exoticization of other cultures, implying that "difference is a negative term to mean 'you are not the same as or equal to me; I'm not different, but you sure are'" (Short, 2019, p. 6). This type of perspective may lead language learners to create one-sided or fixed cultural stereotypes.

In an EFL context, there is no more reliable instructional resource than that suggested by textbooks in learning as well as in teaching English. In South Korea (hereafter, Korea), known as an EFL country, both the production and dissemination of English textbooks are strictly overseen by the Korean Ministry of Education. In recognition of the importance of culture in English language learning, the Ministry of Education implemented a policy of integrating of diverse cultures into English education (Ministry of Education, 2015). This national policy is comprehensively reflected in English textbooks, which are led to introduce various cultures with the intention of promoting appreciation of cultural diversity and fostering intercultural competence.

Nevertheless, however good such an integration of cultural components into English textbooks may be, it still remains incomplete in that the existing approach has given rise to a fatal fallacy from the pedagogical perspective. Too much emphasis on different cultures around the world is, particularly in educational settings, liable to delineate the differences *per se* in a tokenistic manner (Lee, 2020). By doing so, a general tendency may take shape in labeling other cultures or practices as foreign or *Other*. As opposed to what was intended in the policy, an excessive emphasis on cultural differences can, in a sense, lead to the creation of cultural uniformity, where diverse cultures are simplified and idealized.

As a way to investigate such fallacy about the issues of culture, this study explores on how and to what extent cultural *Other* is socially constructed and constantly (re)produced through educational materials, particularly investigating Korean middle school English textbooks. Referring to critical content analysis as an analytical tool based on critical literacy, this paper

takes a questioning stance not only to read the written texts or images but also to read the *world*, and thereby unveils the multiple layers of meanings of diversity from critical perspectives (Freire, 1970). Taking a critical approach, this tool is encouraged for use in understanding issues of (mis)representation in relation to the power structure at play within both visual and written texts in the middle school English textbooks. It further aids in unraveling the ways in which cultural representations construct and reinforce social norms, ideologies, and stereotypes within society. Research questions that revolve throughout the study are as follows:

1) In what way are minority groups' cultural practices represented in the middle school English textbooks?
2) What cultural and/or ideological assumptions underlie the representations of these cultures?
3) How might these cultural details or portrayals influence language learners' understanding of countries, cultures, and people?

In addressing these research questions, a strong emphasis is placed on showing that *Othering* can be realized in various forms: exoticizing, homogenizing, and romanticizing.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Critical Literacy

Freire (1970) noted that "reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world" (p.10). In other words, literacy is not merely about reading or decoding written words or language, but it is intricately interconnected with one's understanding of the world. Critical literacy, therefore, goes beyond the level of simply developing basic reading skills and places an importance on being conscious of the realities, histories, and social trajectories of individuals and groups embedded in texts (Lee, 2021).

This critical approach, as remarked by Pederson (2023), is called for in English language education not only to motivate learners to learn English but also to create a more equitable and democratic society. Examining what is being taught in classrooms through critical literacy, therefore, is significant as it enables individuals to question the underlying values, beliefs, and power relations that are constantly (re)generated through schools as one of the major social institutions. Learners' active engagement in critical literacy, as it stands, entails delving into socio-historical, political, and cultural issues embedded in educational materials while also reflecting on power relations that impact the ideological representations of

individuals or groups. Development of a critical comprehension of texts involves gaining a profound understanding of how a dominant society (re)produces a dominant ideology that may shape, distort, or even erase some racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. This thereby unveils how the curriculum reinforces existing social inequalities and power imbalances (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Crookes, 2017; Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Johnson, Manthis, & Short, 2017; Short, 2017).

2.2. *Othering* and Cultural (Mis)representation

Educational materials including textbooks have played a key role in shaping the perception of diverse cultures and groups of people from different backgrounds of race, class, gender, religions, and so on (Choi & Kim, 2020). Issues of cultural (mis)representation, meanwhile, have been continuously ongoing as many different racial or cultural groups have been under-represented or misrepresented in various ways (Forest, Garrison, & Kimmel, 2015; Thomas, 2016). As a result, stereotyped depictions, whether based on race or ethnicity, continue to persist and perpetuate bias, cultural misinformation, and fixed or one-sided representations of a particular group, which in turn reinforce the binary distinction between *Us* and *Them* (Linares, 2016; Oni-Eseleh, 2021; Tschida et al., 2014).

The discourse of defining a specific group in contrast to oneself, known as *Othering*, originally rooted in colonialist ideology and discourse, relies on the conceptual dichotomy between *Self* and *Other*. During the emergence of modernity in Europe, construing the European itself as *modern* and the non-European as *traditional*, *static*, and *prehistorical* reinforced the colonialist and imperialist discourse. Along with this is the *positional superiority*, which is committed to accelerating the idea that the colonizers are placed in a relatively upper or superior position than the colonized (Said, 1978). From this perspective, the colonizer saw themselves as the proper *Self*, whereas the colonized were considered *Other*, which infers that they are different and inferior (Said, 1978; Tyson, 2006). This practice of judging all that are different by *Othering* and dividing the world between *Us* and *Them* is a part of imperial display of power and is also a form of colonial control (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2002; Nayar, 2015; Tyson, 2006). The binary views and the use of European culture as the norm create Eurocentrism - a process by which European cultural assumptions are constructed as the norm which results in the basis for dominating and exercising authority over non-European cultures. In a similar vein, ethnocentrism consists of two distinct but simultaneous processes: construing one's cultural practices as a norm or commonsense on the one hand, and depicting and judging others based on false assumptions or misrepresentations in highly stereotyped ways on the other hand. This is responsible for a sharp contrast between the two. As *Others*, those who do not conform to the norm are often depicted as racially and culturally backward, uncivilized, underdeveloped, inferior, and

exotic, whereas the in-group are represented as forward, rational, moral, and modern (Jackson, 2014; Pickering, 2001; Said, 1978). In other words, *Othering* is a process of legitimatizing and normalizing one's ways of thinking, behaving, and living while excluding and marginalizing those who do not align with their own.

Education, as a key social institution, plays an influential role in including, excluding and constructing certain identities (Althusser, 1998; Ferretter, 2006). Thus it is of significance for educational professionals including language teachers in particular to grapple with any type of engagement in *Othering*, consciously or unconsciously, as it shapes perception and practices related to many of the issues commonly encountered in education. These issues include classroom interaction, content of instruction, materials selection, types of assessment, and so on (Palfreyman, 2005). Taking into consideration that English textbooks have been the main resource for English language education in Korea, it is imperative to examine how the concept of *Other* is constructed and proliferated through the use of English textbooks.

2.3. Textbooks of English Education in Korea

Textbooks are designed to align with the goals and intentions of national curricula, serving as the main conduit for transmitting the validated and/or legitimate knowledge of society. They are carefully curated repositories of both overt and covert knowledges that have been selected and organized by dominant societal institutions (Apple, 1990; Choi & Kim, 2020; Raina, 2009; Xiang & Yenika-Agbaw, 2019). As the knowledges of the dominant group in a society, both the "textual and visual representations of the [text]books fabricate a certain worldview" (Ideland & Malmberg, 2014, p. 370), which may be committed to creating their own hegemonic perspectives and norms. It is pivotal, therefore, to uncover to what extent and in what way the knowledge, perspectives, and/or norms concerned are being depicted and organized in English textbooks in Korea.

In Korea, the process of textbook production and adoption, whether at the primary or secondary level, is closely regulated by the Ministry of Education. The textbooks are meticulously designed to align the national curriculum and the governments' educational goals and objectives. One of the overarching objectives in English education is not only to enhance English language skills but also to foster global citizenship by promoting an understanding of other cultures, in addition to Korean culture (Kim & Shin, 2022; Ministry of Education, 2015). In line with these national objectives, English textbooks have incorporated a wealth of learning materials from both Korean and non-Korean cultures, with the assumption that introducing various cultures will lead to development of intercultural competence (Yim & Huh, 2020).

As *culture* is recognized as a fundamental component of English education in Korea,

numerous studies have been actively conducted to analyze the English textbooks currently in use, examining whether they align with the objectives of the national curriculum. While many of these studies have taken a descriptive approach, categorizing and displaying the cultural components, they have also sought to assess the proportion of different types of cultures represented in the English textbooks based on Bierstedt's (1970) classification of culture: material culture and non-material culture, which is further subdivided into behavioral culture and mental culture (Kim & Shin, 2022; Ku, 2020; Choi & Lee, 2020; Yim & Huh, 2020). While taking a descriptive approach to categorizing cultural components in English textbooks is valuable, few studies are far from being critical enough to unveil the role textbooks play in constructing and disseminating particular worldviews. This study, in this respect, unpacks the ways in which racial, ethnic, and cultural subjects are (mis)represented and thereby generate the dichotomy between *Self* and *Other*.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Critical Content Analysis

In this study, a qualitative research approach is employed, utilizing Critical Content Analysis as an analytical tool to examine the written and visual texts concerning culture in English textbooks. The term 'critical' focuses on interrogating power dynamics within social practices and unveiling issues related to power, discourse, and hegemony (Freire, 1970; Gee, 2011; Giroux, 1992). This analysis uncovers unequal conditions by challenging the status quo and embedded realities (Freire, 1970; Merriam, 2009; Raina 2009; Rogers, 2004). It does so by posing questions about whose views of the world are represented, "whose stories are told or silenced, and how the stories are being told" (Lee, 2021, p. 5) in the texts. This approach allows us to delve into the underlying assumptions behind the cultural representations presented in the texts (Beach et al., 2009).

By examining how power is manifested in the content, this critical perspective guides us in deconstructing prevailing ideologies that have contributed to sustaining social inequalities and distributing uneven power within society (Johnson et al., 2017, 2019). In doing so, it also provides a framework to disrupt binary thinking, uncovering how power structures operate within the texts (Botelho & Rudiman, 2009).

3.2. Data Collection

Considering that compulsory education in Korea spans three years, covering grades 7 to 9 in middle school, it becomes crucial to uncover both explicit and implicit racial ideologies

and stereotypes that are consistently (re)emerging in middle school English textbooks. The first stage of data collection for this research involved the eight different publishers of English textbooks. These publishers include Chunjae Gyoyook, DongA, NeungRyul, Visang, YBM, MiraeN, Jihak, and KumSung. The next stage involved determining how many middle schools have adopted English textbooks from each of these publishers. To achieve this, contacted were 52 middle schools in one of the major metropolitan cities of Korea to inquire about the publisher of their English textbooks. The results of this textbook adoption by the middle schools are in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Adoption Rate of English Textbooks [1]

Publisher	Number of Schools	Adoption Rate
DongA	24	46.2%
Chunjae Gyoyook	7	13.4%
Visang	7	13.4%
NeungRyul	5	9.6%
YBM	5	9.6%
MiraeN	4	7.7%
Jihak	0	0.0%
KumSung	0	0.0%

   Among the eight publishers listed in Table 1, the first four were chosen for data collection based on their adoption rate. It is worth noting that, despite being equally popular with five schools, YBM was excluded from this research due to its lack of content relevant to the themes of the research, while NeungRyul was included.

   The data collected and analyzed encompass English textbooks from four different publishers for each grade, resulting in a total of twelve English textbooks. The collected data are presented in Table 2.

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[1] Table 1 was made based on a telephone survey, conducted in October, 2023. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all the middle schools for their responses regarding the adoption of their English textbooks.

TABLE 2

Data Collected [2]

Grade 1 (7th)		Grade 2 (8th)		Grade 3 (9th)	
Publisher	Year	Publisher	Year	Publisher	Year
Chunjae Gyoyook	2017	Chunjae Gyoyook	2018	Chunjae Gyoyook	2019
DongA	2018	DongA	2018	DongA	2019
NeungRyul	2017	NeungRyul	2017	NeungRyul	2019
Visang	2017	Visang	2019	Visang	2019

Each team of authors comprises professors and current English teachers. Professors are affiliated with either the Department of English Language and Literature or the Department of English Education. Typically, a native English-speaking professor is involved as an author to oversee entire lessons of the textbook. Additionally, most of the illustrators who contributed to the English textbook development process were Koreans. It is important to note that all the textbooks undergo monitoring and approval by the Korean Ministry of Education.

3.3. Process of Data Analysis

The initial phase of data collection involves extraction of visual texts that represent the *Other* while reviewing the English textbook lessons. It is worth noting that certain textbooks include dedicated culture sections introducing various cultures, while others do not feature such sections. It is important to emphasize that the assessment of cultural (mis)representations was not limited exclusively to the culture section but extended to a comprehensive review of all sections, examining how the *Other* is depicted.

Visual texts portraying universal and dominant cultures are excluded from this phase. In this context, dominant culture encompasses two aspects: (1) Western culture, as evident in many Korean middle school textbook materials, particularly featuring American cultural practices (Park, Jeon, & Lee, 2022), and (2) Korean culture. Korean cultural representations prevail within the English textbooks (Park et al., 2022), in which Korean culture is perceived

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[2] Note that non-probability sampling was used to select four out of eight publishers of English middle school textbooks in Korea. This study is qualitative in nature and does not rely on statistical data in general. It is important to clarify that the purpose of this research is to shed light on and gain insight into the potential to uncover the (mis)representation of different cultures through a critical content analysis perspective. Each of these publishers produces a series of English textbooks specifically designed for middle school students, covering grades one (7th grade) to three (9th grade). It is important to note that even within the same publisher's series, the textbooks used for data collection may have different publication years. This intentional variation was introduced to diversify the data by involving different teams of authors and illustrators across different publication years.

as the dominant cultural framework within the Korean context, categorizing it as a dominant culture. The data extracted during this phase are not sorted according to Bierstedt's (1970) traditional categories of culture, while typically encompass both material and non-material aspects of culture. This decision is made because both material and non-material cultural components can be relevant in representing certain cultures.

To guide the data analysis process and reconstruct how the data are categorized, additional questions are posed, including: (1) What cultural depictions of minority groups can be identified in the textbooks? (2) Do the textbooks predominantly project a single narrative, or include various narratives when depicting minority groups? (3) What underlying ideological assumptions are reflected in these cultural details or portrayals? (4) How do these portrayals perpetuate the process of minoritizing these groups? In examining these questions, a close reading of visual texts is conducted from a theoretical perspective of critical literacy (Beach et al., 2009; Freire, 1970). When interweaving theory and data as a way of thinking in a more integral way (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012), there are several instances of revisiting the data while reviewing critical literacy theory. Taking an efferent stance (Rosenblatt, 1938), it is crucial to delve into "the process of identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns in the data" (Patton, 1990, p. 381). All visual texts are closely analyzed, and both initial and analytical responses to the texts are documented in the margins whenever emerging themes, issues, tensions, and questions regarding representations arise (Beach et al., 2009; Short, 2019). The activities of rereading, re-viewing, and recording are recursive, and thematic patterns are then categorized based on the documented responses.

Focusing on the visual representations of different cultures presented in English textbooks, overlapping themes are identified that span across the data. These themes include representations of cultural items such as food, fashion, and a country's landscape. These initial thematic patterns were further analyzed and categorized through the lens of critical literacy, with its theoretical underpinning woven into this analysis. Based on this process, the major findings of this study are as follows: (1) Exoticizing and *Othering* Hawai'ian Culture, (2) Homogenization of Africa, and (3) Romanticizing and Gazing at the Lives of Indigenous Groups.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Adhering to the National Curriculum of English, all the textbooks are organized to provide learners with extensive exposure to diverse cultures. Various cultures are introduced through a wide range of cultural elements, including culturally specific musical instruments, different culinary styles and cuisines, as well as famous places or tourist attractions from around the

world. Figure 1, taken from Lesson 5 *Styles Around the World* in *DongA 1*[3,] serves as a typical example illustrating that a single cultural item solely represents an entire culture.

FIGURE 1

Diverse Cultural Artifacts
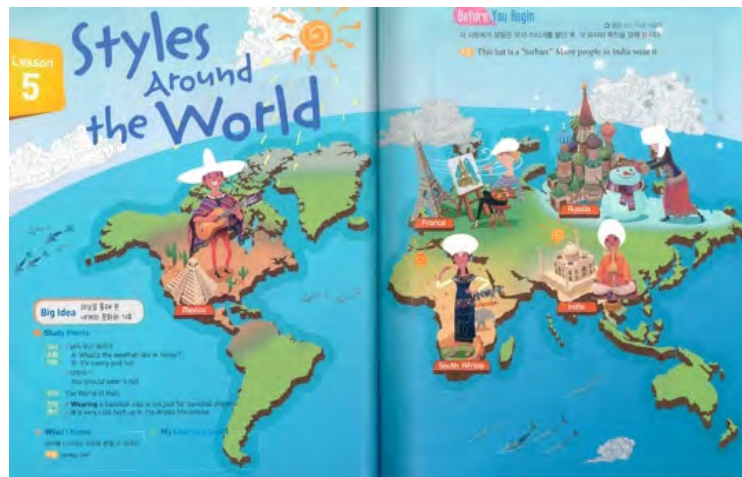
(Lesson 5, *Styles Around the World*, pp. 76-77)

When addressing the various facets of culturally diverse backgrounds, learners are encouraged to affix appropriate stickers to the blank spaces on individuals' heads. Figure 1 effectively illustrates the representations of different cultures by associating them with distinct material artifacts, typically demonstrated by aligning specific tangible objects with their respective countries. As emblematic depictions of particular cultures, cultural artifacts establish a recurring theme that consistently appears throughout middle school English textbooks. Figure 1 is succinctly summarized as a collection of matching pairs below.

> India – Turban
> Mexico – Sombrero
> Russia – Ushanka
> South Africa – Isicholo
> France – Beret

Learners are instructed to fill in the names of hats that correspond to various countries, a task that can easily yield correct answers, as demonstrated in the matching pairs above. When

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[3] To simplify reference, a number is given to the publisher's name to specify the textbook for a particular grade level. For example, *DongA 1* will denote the Middle School English 1 textbook published by *DongA*.

students successfully complete this classroom activity, they may feel content with their knowledge of diverse world cultures.

However, there is a significant drawback to this approach in understanding cultures – it tends to oversimplify them. For example, what we commonly refer to as "Indian culture" is not confined solely in India. In reality, Indian culture extends beyond India's borders to countries with intertwined histories, religions, or practices connected to India in various ways. It's important to recognize that culture and country may not always have a one-to-one relationship; they can exist in one-to-many or many-to-one configurations.

As exemplified by the India-Turban pairing, it is accurate to say that turbans are worn in India or by Indians. However, when considering turbans as part of a cultural costume, it's noteworthy that the turban is one of the most widespread costume elements. It is used not only in India but also in many other regions worldwide, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Indonesia, Greece, the Philippines, Yemen, and more. Moreover, it is worth exploring additional questions about turbans as a cultural item such as: (1) What percentage of Indians wear turbans daily? (2) Is the use of different types of turbans related to various social statuses within a caste system? (3) Does the wearing of turbans have religious significance across different faiths in India? The same complexity applies to the other four matching pairs discussed here.

In this approach to cultural education, the challenge lies in its inability to provide learners with a profound understanding of the true essence of cultural diversity. Instead, it tends to foster only fragmented knowledge of world cultures. As it stands, this learning process might relegate classroom activities to nothing more than quiz-style puzzles or, at best, short-answer tests.

This chapter, divided into three sections, delves into how recurring patterns of misunderstanding or oversimplification of diverse cultures contribute to the creation and perpetuation of the *Other* in middle school English textbooks.

4.1. Exoticizing and *Othering* Hawai'ian Culture

It is of significance that a wide range of cultures around the world are introduced to help students understand the cultural diversities and differences. Visually depicted in particular are cultural attitudes and/or practices to show the ways of life among the different cultural groups. More often than not, the cultural representations themselves may well be portrayed with accurate information and facts. However, what is at stake is that such specific information and facts may lead to the definitive story of a cultural group when they are consistently portrayed as singular entities, resulting in the ingrained construction of limited and narrow perspectives. This, in turn, confines the multidimensionality of the subjects, restricting them to a singular and oversimplified characterization, which fosters a tendency

to *other* them. An example would be Figure 2, which is from Lesson 7, *Time for Stories* in *NeungRyul 1*[4].

FIGURE 2
Hawai'i Language and Culture

(Lesson 7, *Time for Stories*, p.158)

As depicted here, the *NeungRyul* series of English textbooks include a *Culture Link* in every lesson, which specifically addresses cultural components related to the theme of each lesson. The lesson entitled *Time for Stories* primarily revolves around various stories and myths from around the world. In this particular lesson, the *Culture Link* section invites learners to delve into the storytelling practices.

One of these cultures focuses on traditional Hawai'ian stories. On the left side of Figure 2 is an actual photo of young girls adorned with *leis*, which are fresh flower necklaces typically given as a welcoming or farewell gift in Hawai'i. Their hand gestures suggest that they are engaged in dancing. On the right side of Figure 2, there is an illustration depicting three female Hawai'ians dancing under a palm tree. Similar to the photo on the left, these women also wear *leis* as well *pa'u'*, grass skirts originally crafted from native *ti* plant leaves, and additional accessories such as anklet and flower headpiece. As indicated by the sentence at the bottom of the right side in Figure 2, which states that "in Hawaii, people tell traditional stories by hula dancing," this dancing form serves as a method of storytelling.

While it is true that hula dancing often accompanies chants or songs known as *mele*, it is

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[4] Other textbooks also contained elements of Hawai'i, primarily focusing on the natural context with visual representations of palm trees and dolphins. However, as the focus is on the representation of cultural practices, those data on natural contexts were not included in this discussion.

important to acknowledge that this portrayal often presents a romanticized and unrealistic image of Hawai'i. As Lippi-Green (2011) points out, this idealized depiction is frequently perpetuated by media images of "luaus, pristine beaches, and an easy-going aloha spirit that makes everyone welcome and equal" (p. 235). Media continues to wield significant influence in shaping and perpetuating the commercial image of *hula girls,* often exoticizing Hawai'ian traditions (Hajibayova & Buente, 2017; Sitzer, 2004). Unfortunately, this can lead to the erasure of their socio-historical, political, and cultural contexts.

Ever since the settlers from the East immigrated to Hawai'i, hula has been an integral part of Hawai'i literary and artistic history. As a sacred ritual, it played a vital role in Hawai'ian oral traditions, through which their myths and legends were passed down from generation to generation (Chang, 2013; Sitzer, 2004).

When Western missionaries reached Hawai'i in the 1800s, they viewed hula dancing as "heathen, savage, and ungodly" (Sitzer, 2004, p. 13). For them, "eliminating hula was one of the initial steps in converting the 'savage natives' into 'good Christians'" (Sitzer, 2004, p. 13). Suppressed by state apparatus and ideological state apparatus (Althusser, 1998), hula no longer continued as a tradition, especially after the overthrow of the monarchy in 1893. It wasn't until the early in the 20th century that hula became a part of mainstream American culture. Among various factors, the promotion of Hawai'i at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, held in San Francisco in 1915, served as a catalyst for increased tourist interest, bringing in sweeping and far-reaching popularity for Hawai'i as an international tourist destination. The Hawai'ian tourist industry continued to grow and its music and dance evolved by incorporating modern or "civilized musical instruments" (Sitzer, 2004, p. 26) and the English language to provide "a taste of home as well as a taste of something *exotic*" (Sitzer, 2004, p. 27, emphasis added).

Hula dancing and hula girls, previously stigmatized as primitive, underwent a process of reinterpretation aligned with the preferences of the dominant American society. Rather than starkly deviating, it was strategically reconstructed to possess an exotic allure that could be aptly assimilated into the dominant societal framework. Viewed from a tourist perspective or commodified in various fields including tourism, media, and even education, this commodification of hula has contributed to exoticizing and labeling this particular group, further institutionalizing tokenism and erasing the socio-historical and cultural contexts.

4.2. Homogenization of Africa

Another representational issue widely identified in the middle school English textbooks is the portrayal of Africa. The following two figures are from *Chunjae Gyoyook* 1.

FIGURE 3   **FIGURE 4**

Student Playing the Djembe   **African Drum Djembe**
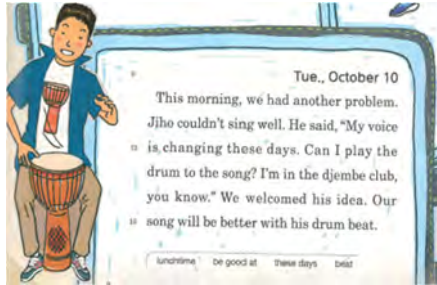
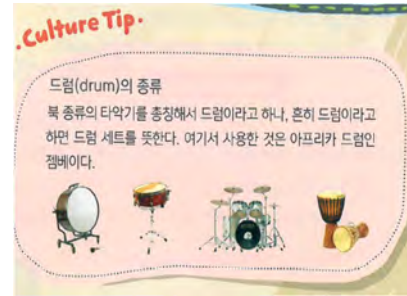(Lesson 6, *Let's Have Fun at School*, pp.108-109)

Figure 3 and 4 are part of Lesson 6, *Let's Have Fun at School,* which is about students preparing for a school music contest. In the reading section, one of the main characters, Jiho, offers to play the drum indicating that he is in the djembe club. Figure 3 illustrates Jiho's playing the djembe. On the next page, the authors provide a brief explanation about the djembe in Korean as seen in Figure 4. The English translation of the Korean description is as follows [5] :

> Type of drums
> Various types of percussion instrument are often referred to as a cover term *drum*, meaning a drum set. The word *drum* used in this reading is the *djembe*, an *African* drum [emphasis added].

As shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4, it is worth noting that whenever African culture is addressed in English textbooks, there is a consistent emphasis on its musical aspect, particularly in relation to percussive elements. As Agawu (1995) points out, "African music is predisposed toward percussion and percussive texture," (p. 383) resulting in a highlighted focus on rhythm. Drums are almost invariably depicted as an essential element in portraying African music as Figure 6 below.

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[5] The translation was done by the author.

FIGURE 5
Cover of Chapter 5

FIGURE 6
Portrayal of African Music

(Lesson 4, *Music to My Ears!*, pp. 63-64)

Both Figure 5 and 6 are taken from Lesson 4, *Music to My Ears!* from *Visang 3*. The central theme of this lesson revolves around the engagement in musical activities, and the cover page of the lesson prominently showcases a variety of different music genres, as illustrated in Figure 5. Figure 6 provides a magnified depiction of musical performance feature in the lower left corner of Figure 5, focusing on a booth titled *African Music*. Accompanying Figure 6 is a representation of percussive behavior, which is often associated with African music as can be clearly seen in Figure 7. In the lower left of Figure 7, sourced from *DongA 2*, there is a simplified human figure engaged in percussive movements or gestures, holding what appears to be two drumsticks, symbolizing an African music concert, as explicitly mentioned in the description. Additionally, this figure incorporates African ethnic or tribal-like decorative patterns such as lines, spirals, and repeated colorful triangle shapes.

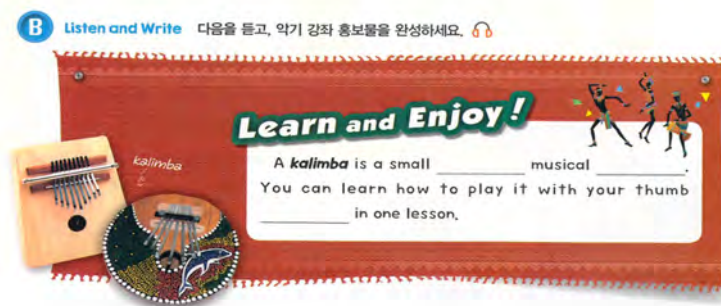**Figure 7**
Representations of African Music

(Lesson 2, *Enjoying Local Culture*, p.31)

It is worth noting that among various cultural aspects, music has often been chosen as a representation of Africa. African music has been seen as a significant way to distinguish *Africans* as *Other* from *Us*, the Euro-Americans (Agawu, 1995; Olivier, 2019). The Western fascination with *African* music, often characterized by its percussive rhythm, dates back to at least the eleventh century. For instance, a Christian physician and theologian Ibn Butlan described people of African descent as possessing "an essential and irreducible rhythmic disposition" (Agawu, 1995, p. 380) implying that their rhythmic tradition were markedly different from Western music and inherent to African culture or identity.

The imaginary construction of African music involves the West's creation of a narrative that intentionally amplifies perceived differences from Western musical traditions. This narrative inadvertently marginalizes and exoticizes African musical practices. This dominant ideology has persisted in various forms, and is even found in English textbooks for Korean middle school students.

The claim that percussive musical activity is inherently *African* implies that African music is a homogeneous body of music (Agawu, 1995). However, whether intentionally or unintentionally, a non-percussive musical instrument called *Kalimba* was introduced as an *African* musical instrument, as shown in Figure 8 from *Visang 3*.

FIGURE 8

Kalimba as *African* Musical Instrument

(Lesson 4, *Music to My Ears*, p. 68)

Figure 8 is part of a listening activity introducing the Kalimba as an African musical instrument. The script of this listening activity is as follows.

Are you planning to learn a musical instrument? I'd like to recommend the Kalimba, a small *African* musical instrument. The sound it makes is similar to that of a music box. Playing a kalimba is very easy. You can learn to use your thumb nails to play beautiful music in just one lesson! [emphasis added]

After listening to the audio file, students are to fill in the blanks with appropriate words, which are *African*, *instrument*, and *nails*, respectively. This activity also adheres to a similar trajectory of progression, forging the dominant ideology by pinpointing this specific musical instrument as solely African, even when its authenticity lies in a specific country, region or town. By doing so, it reproduces the "metonymic fallacy - the part representing the whole" (Agawu, 1995, p. 385). This making of the part-whole equation, according to Agawu (1995), is also a "product of European and postcolonial discourse" (p. 385), obscuring the diversity and complexity of cultural practices, and thereby constructing simplified alterity.

In both Figure 7 and Figure 8, labels such as *African music(al)* carry a homogenizing meaning that diminishes the rich diversity of cultural traditions. This reduction to a monolithic connotation, as noted by Agawu (1995), Mabingo (2022), and Ogude (2012), oversimplifies a complex reality. Africa is a vast continent comprising 55 countries, inhabited by more than 1.3 billion people who speak thousands of languages and practice various cultural traditions.

Despite this diversity, representing Africa as a singular country or culture erases the profound "epistemological and ontological depth and complexity of practices, traditions, and people" (Mabingo, 2022, p.5). This example of how Africa is portrayed in Korean English textbooks illustrates how the notion of the *Other* is constructed and perpetuated through an ideology that homogenizes the diverse cultural traits and identities of its inhabitants.

4.3. Romanticizing and Gazing the Life of Indigenous People

As historical events and worldviews form an integral part of understanding a culture, it is natural that stories from the past or those occurring in the present should be introduced and dealt with in textbooks. Particularly in the reading sections of textbooks, it is notable to find interesting stories about diverse groups of people, their ways of life, and their perspectives on the world. These stories serve to provide cultural insights and awareness of individuals or groups of people from different parts of the world, inviting learners not only to understand the present but also to learn about the past. These stories can be well described with detailed information and intriguing facts. However, a critical issue may be embedded in the representations of Indigenous people in particular countries. Among the various groups of people in the past and present, there used to be tension, in one way or another, in racial representations, especially when Indigenous people and their communities are portrayed in textbooks. The images of Indigenous groups shared in English textbooks are not problematic on their own, but the limited representations of this particular group may pose issues. For example, in Lesson 2, *Foods Around the World* of *Neungryul 3,* the history of popcorn is covered with a reading passage that delivers a story about the historical aspect of popcorn, as indicated in Figure 9.

FIGURE 9

Indigenous People's Historical Information About Popcorn
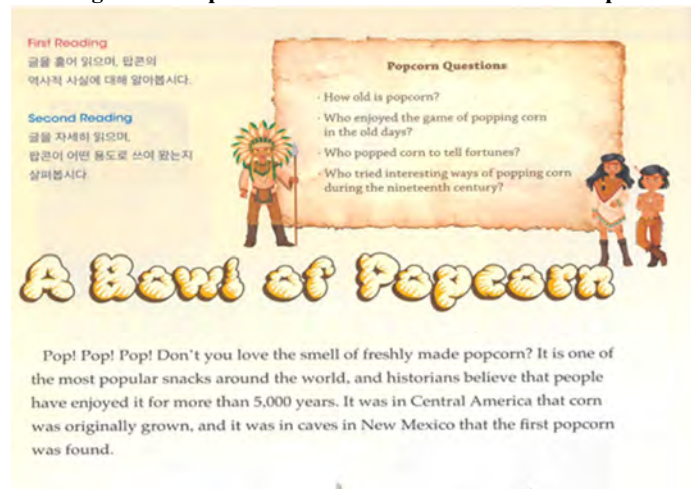
(Lesson 2, *Foods Around the World*, p. 40)

The passage explains the origins of popcorn, its discovery in Central America, its use as decoration by the Aztecs, and how Native Americans used it for entertainment. According to the text, popcorn was originally cultivated in Central America, and the first popcorn kernels were discovered in caves in New Mexico. The main reading also describes how many young girls used popcorn to adorn their clothing, believing that it could bring them good health and protection from benevolent spirits. Additionally, the text recounts the story of how Native Americans enjoyed playing with popcorn by tossing it unto hot stones to create delightful snacks.

While the historical content about popcorn is informative and captivating for English language learners, it's important to closely examine the visual representations of Native Americans, given the exclusive use of fixed images in the reading. These images often present a homogenized and generalized portrayal of Indigenous people, frequently romanticizing them without acknowledging the rich diversity of their cultures. Consequently, these depictions, as a result, may create a misleading perception that all Native Americans share the same characteristics and experiences.

The portrayal of Indigenous people in imagery often highlights romanticized and stereotypical representations, such as warriors and the *Noble Savage* archetype. For instance, in Figure 9, the individual on the left part of the *Popcorn Questions*, is depicted wearing a feathered war bonnet and warrior attire. Similarly, on the right side, two children are shown with feathers on their heads, wearing traditional clothing and moccasin-like boots. These visuals, without prior knowledge or understanding of the diverse cultures within different

Native American tribes, may create a perception of a singular "Indianness," implying that all Native Americans wear feathered headdresses, beads, or moccasins. This fixation on specific imagery presents Native Americans as historical figures, typically associated with the 18th and 19th centuries, dwelling in teepees, clad in buckskin and feathers, and skilled in horse riding (Leavitt, Perez, & Fryberg, 2015). It's important to note that the analyzed data did not include any instances where Indigenous people are portrayed as contemporary individuals. This lack of contemporary portrayals contributes to the construction and reinforcement of the notion that Indigenous people exist primarily as historical figures, let alone in a negatively stereotyped manner. This invisibility of contemporary portrayals results in construction and solidification of these people as historical figures.

Furthermore, written descriptions often emphasize the strong belief systems of Native Americans related to well-being and goodwill. These descriptions have historically been used to rationalize and justify the *Noble Savage* stereotype, a mythical concept created by Euro-Americans to symbolize the inherent goodness of Native Americans and their spiritual connection with nature. This spiritual communication and profound connection to nature have, in turn, reinforced the perception of Indigenous people as lawless and barbaric by those who held such biases (Carr, 1996; Hames, 2007; Redford, 1991; Ross, 1988).

The ideology of the *Noble Savage* continues to be perpetuated in different English textbooks. In Lesson 4, titled *Natural Weather Forecasters* from *Neungryul 2,* for example, the main reading explains how vegetation serves as an indicator for predicting natural weather patterns. This lesson is structured as a series of blog posts, with the host, a young boy, sharing his story of experiencing a sign of a natural weather forecast. He also invites others to share their diverse natural weather forecast stories. In response, several posts and comments recount other people's experiences and knowledge of natural weather forecasts. Two individuals mentioned that flowers, specifically morning glory and poor man's weatherglass, open up in fine weather and close on rainy days or when bad weather is on the way. These respondents explained that this particular behavior of flowers serves as a way for people to predict upcoming weather conditions. In addition to these posts, the final respondent, Evergreen, shared a post about a pinecone, which is considered a reliable weather forecaster, as depicted in Figure 10.

FIGURE 10

Nature and Native Americans

(Lesson 4, *Natural Weather Forecaster*, p. 76)

In Figure 10, the upper-left corner features a photo of Evergreen, who provides insightful information about the significance of pinecones to Native Americans. She explains how pinecones have symbolized wisdom and served as weather forecasters in Native American culture. Evergreen elaborates on the long-standing tradition of observing pinecone reaction, such as closing up during wet weather, in farming practices.

The visual illustration accompanying the text depicts Native Americans in a natural setting with mountains and pine trees. In the bottom left corner of Figure 10, a Native American, partially covered by their attire, holds a pinecone. In the background, two Native Americans are harvesting what appears to be corn, while another native American in the right corner, wearing a poncho, is carrying the harvested crops.

The information provided by Evergreen, along with the images presented in the reading, greatly enriches readers' understanding of the epistemological and cultural significance of pinecones in Native American traditions. However, it is important to note that solely focusing on this discourse might unintentionally place too much emphasis on their emotional, spiritual, and cultural connection with nature (Hames, 2007; Ross, 1998).

In many cases, Native Americans have been simplistically associated with traditional ways of life and beliefs, including land practices and traditional ecological knowledge, as well as oral and literary traditions, cultural beliefs, and spiritual practices (Redford, 1991).

However, these representations can inadvertently perpetuate the notion of the *Noble Savage*, which creates fixed portrayals of Native Americans as uncivilized, static, frozen in time, outdated, and even as people who are vanishing or living in the past. These problematic images are also identified in *Chunjae Gyoyook 3*, as shown in Figure 11.

FIGURE 11
Primitive Indigenous People
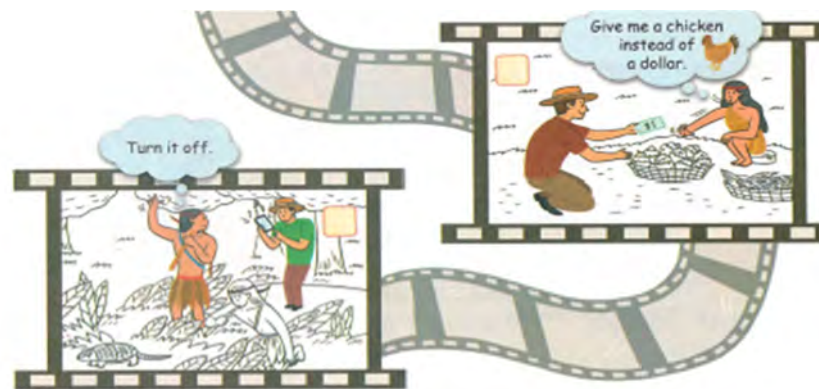
(Lesson 5, *Pictures Speak a Thousand Words*, p. 98)

In the *Express Yourself* section of Lesson 5, titled *Pictures Speak a Thousand Words*, the textbook presents a listening and speaking activity. In this activity, students are required to listen to a short dialogue and then choose the illustration that corresponds to the dialogue. The specific title of this activity is *Amazon Tour*, which suggests that the figures in Figure 11 represent Amazon natives.

Figure 11 portrays an interaction between two individuals: one appears to be an Amazon native, and the other is a non-native person who seems to be a visitor. On the right side of Figure 11, there is an illustration of an interaction between an Amazon native who is wearing traditional attire and a seemingly more modern individual dressed in contemporary clothing, including a shirt, pants, shoes, and a hat. In this image, the person in modern attire wishes to purchase fish from the Amazon native and offers cash directly. However, the native expresses a desire to barter instead, as indicated by a thought bubble that reads, "Give me a chicken instead of a dollar."

On the left side of Figure 11, the Amazon native is engaged in the hunting process, while the visitor is capturing a photograph of the hunting activity. In this image, the Amazon native is shown having an inner monologue that says, "Turn it off." This inner dialogue implies the native's disapproval or dissatisfaction with the visitor's action, suggesting that the visitor's behavior may be considered inappropriate or discomforting from the natives' perspective.

In this scene, it's essential to pay critical attention to the contrasting representations of the two figures. While the visitor is depicted as someone who has been living a contemporary and modern life, the Indigenous individual is visually portrayed as traditional, backward, or even primitive. The actions of these figures in the scene further emphasize these contrasting images. Their engagement in hunting in a natural setting and their preference for bartering suggest that the Indigenous people are depicted as remaining in an ancient time period, deeply connected to nature, undeveloped, and static in time. In contrast, the visitor's act of photographing the Indigenous man's posture and hunting activity symbolizes objectification and a gaze rooted in positional superiority.

This issue of objectification and the gaze of the outsider is also evident in Figure 10. The narrative about pinecones and Native Americans' lifestyle, authored by the non-Native writer named Evergreen, is told from an outsider's perspective, particularly from the viewpoint of a white female writer. As Willis-Rivera and Meeker (2002) point out, people of color in multicultural texts are often read from the standpoint of whiteness or the White gaze, and racial groups are frequently represented as exotic commodities, placed in a position of objectification for the White gaze. The White gaze is defined as "the colonialist construction of the Other for the consumption and convenience of White people" (Dorrel, 2018, p. 267). The White gaze has become a means of defining, devaluing, or even erasing the existence of Indigenous people and their communities. These images of them have been intentionally distorted, fabricated, and commodified, both implicitly and explicitly, reinforcing *Otherness* through the lens of White gaze (Leavitt et al., 2018; Meyer & Royer, 2001). The dominant power of Eurocentric or White society has dichotomized *Us* and *Them*, perpetuating negative and stereotypical representations of Indigenous people and communities to further marginalize them.

5. CONCLUSION

By employing Critical Content Analysis as an analytical tool, this study addresses how different cultures are portrayed in middle school English textbooks in Korea. Specifically, it examines both written and visual representations to unveil how the *Other* is constructed and, in doing so, attempts to deconstruct the underlying meanings embedded in the EFL educational materials. The analysis yielded significant key findings, revealing tendencies such as the distortion of Hawai'ian culture to conform to exoticized expectations of dominant White American society, the oversimplification and homogenization of the complexity of cultural practices in Africa, and the romanticization and historicization of Indigenous peoples with limited representations. Notably, certain cultural representations in Korean middle school English textbooks exhibited inclinations toward aligning with Eurocentric

colonialist discourse.

These findings not only underscore the critical significance of scrutinizing cultural representations in educational materials but also shed light on the need to demystify the ideological underpinnings of institutionalized knowledge. This insight becomes particularly relevant when considering the National Curriculum of English, which acknowledges the significance of developing intercultural understanding. Though highlighted, the National Curriculum fall short in offering specific guidelines merely suggesting to explore topics about lives of people from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Ministry of Education, 2015). While various cultural components are included in the textbooks, much of the content is presented from a tokenistic perspective, which may result in (re)generating stereotypes or bias toward others, potentially hindering the development of intercultural understanding.

Dismantling the dichotomy of *Self* and *Other* and cultivating intercultural understanding involve "far more than lessons on human relations and sensitivity training or *adding a book or unit about a country into the existing curriculum*" (Short, 2009, p. 2, emphasis added). It is essential for teachers, therefore, to take an active role in cultivating intercultural understanding among students. In this regard, teacher education plays a pivotal role in equipping educators with the appropriate approaches and tools to address and overcome the challenges associated with fostering intercultural understanding in the classroom (Adichie, 2009; Lee, 2022; Tschida et al., 2014). In addition, it is important to note that young learners have the capacity to critically read the word and the world (Kaser & Short, 1998; Short, 2012). This recognition of learners' capabilities further underscores the importance of educators and teacher education in promoting intercultural understanding within the school environment.

While the scope of this study is constrained by its examination of middle school English textbooks from a selection of four publishers, it holds significance in its capacity to demonstrate the influence of cultural representations within textbooks, which, as institutionalized form of knowledge, possess the capability to mold perceptions and actively contribute to the construction and perpetuation of a single narrative of others. A single story emerges when a people are depicted as only one-dimensional entities. When these single stories are repeatedly retold, they become deeply ingrained common narratives, wielding the power to (re)construct and marginalize the *Others*, thereby upholding and perpetuating the oppressive status quo. Critical literacy, therefore, holds great significance in empowering not only educational professionals but also learners to dismantle the power dynamics inherent in the construction and dissemination of cultural representations. Through critical literacy, they can actively counteract the perpetuation of biases, exclusions, and distortions embedded within these representations.

Applicable level: Secondary

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