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How Do Intercultural Communication Textbooks Represent Culture? A Case Study of Chinese Culture

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Abstract: Intercultural communication (IC) textbooks are important means to transfer and construct knowledge about different cultural groups, yet it is still not clear how specific cultures are represented in these educational materials. This study addresses the question by analyzing the content of Chinese culture represented in a sample of intercultural communication textbooks. The findings show that (1) a variety of Chinese cultural contents are covered in IC textbooks, among which cultural products and persons are the most frequent references followed by cultural practices and perspectives; (2) representations of Chinese culture reflect diverse conceptualizations of culture ranging from essential to non-essential orientations; (3) Chinese cultures are presented often with theoretical concepts of the IC field and in comparative contexts together with other cultures. Differences in cultural representation between IC and language textbooks and their educational implications are discussed at the end.

Keywords: evaluation of teaching materials; textbook analysis; education

1. Introduction

Textbooks are educational materials that present and reproduce human knowledge based on predefined curriculum (Risager 2018). They are not only important carriers of disciplinary knowledge, values, thoughts, and beliefs, but also indispensable references for teaching (Wu et al. 2016). Textbook analysis can reveal what is being communicated to the learners and how this is being achieved. Such findings are instrumental for educators to evaluate the appropriateness of teaching materials, to identify missing or misrepresented information, or to be aware of the implicit impacts of popular ideologies. In other words, textbook analysis provides researchers with an opportunity to examine what is conveyed, either intentionally or unintentionally, in educational materials (Miles 1997).

Among the various topics of textbook analysis research, the study of cultural representation occupies a special place and has been carried out by scholars from fields such as socio-linguistics, communication science, literature, history, education, etc. (Canale 2021; Risager and Chapelle 2013). Research suggests that textbooks can play a significant role in constructing national identity and branding cultural/national/ethnic images (Lv 2016; Ohliger 1999; Popow 2014), or be effective tools to increase multicultural exposure and enhance cultural awareness (Canale 2016; Risager 2022; Tajeddin and Teimournezhad 2014).

Culture is an integral part of language teaching. Therefore, cultural representation in language textbooks is also an important topic for research. Questions such as the cultures that are selected and represented, in what way, and why are often discussed and debated (Risager and Chapelle 2013). Analysis of cultural contents in textbooks of different languages, such as English, Chinese, German, French, and Spanish, shows that language textbooks generally cover a wide range of cultural and intercultural topics (Shin et al. 2011; Tomlinson and Masuhara 2017; Risager 2018; Zhang 2023).

However, besides language textbooks, cultural representation in other textbooks that are useful for language learners, such as literature, translation, and intercultural communication, has not been well studied. Although much emphasis has been placed on integrating

cultural learning with language learning, language textbooks cannot be fully devoted to cultural representations. In comparison, intercultural communication is a specialized field dedicated to learning about cultures and interactions between cultures. Therefore, its textbooks are "particular important sites where specific images of cultural others are presented" (Chang et al. 2006, p. 313). Given the importance of culture plays as a key construct in the field of intercultural communication studies, it would be interesting to know how its textbooks represent cultures. Furthermore, differences between IC textbooks and language textbooks are also worth exploring to see whether they are similar, contradictory, or complementary.

This study is designed to take an initial step to address these questions by investigating how Chinese culture is represented in IC textbooks. Representation of the Chinese culture is the case in point because it is the home culture that the three authors are most familiar with, and also because it often appears as a prominent reference group to Western cultures in cross-cultural comparisons (Chang et al. 2006).

Specifically, we intend to examine intercultural textbooks regarding their presentation of culture-related contents and answer the following question:

What dimensions of Chinese culture are covered in the textbooks of IC and how are they represented?

We also discuss the conceptualizations of culture exemplified by the representation of Chinese culture in these textbooks based on the findings.

In the following sections, we review studies of cultural contents in textbooks as a basis for analyzing IC textbooks. Then, we look at how sample textbooks are selected and analyzed is explained. Last, we present the general findings and discuss their implications for language education and indigenous textbook compiling.

2. Cultural Representation in Textbooks

There are two major driving forces for studying how cultures are incorporated and presented in textbooks. One is a desire for constructing positive images associated with a particular cultural group so as to strengthen ingroup identification or improve outgroup evaluation (Geng and Liu 2020; Xiong and Peng 2021; Zhang and Gao 2022). The other motivational factor is the belief that culture is essential to language learning (Kramsch 1993, 2002), so it is desirable to analyze the cultural contents in language textbooks (Cortazzi and Jin 1999; Risager 2018).

Views about how culture should be treated in language education have changed several times (Weninger and Kiss 2013). At the beginning, culture (of the target language) was seen as an object that is external to language learning and represented by easily observable entities, such as food, fairs, folklores, and statistical facts (Kramsch 1991). This view was gradually replaced by the perception of culture as the communicative context for language use. As a result, small "c" culture, which includes the socio-cultural values, norms, beliefs, and assumptions, as well as daily cultural practices, were taught together with languages. More recently, the need to cultivate intercultural competence is emphasized and diverse cultural exposure and intercultural awareness became the new focus of foreign language education (Byram and Morgan 1994).

Informed by the diverse views of the relationship between culture and language learning, language textbooks, especially English as a foreign/international language (EFL/EIL) textbooks, become common targets of textbook analysis. The majority of such studies focus on two questions: (1) whose cultures are represented in language textbooks and (2) what cultural contents are represented and in what manner?

With regard to the types of culture in language textbooks, Cortazzi and Jin (1999) propose a classification that categorize them into source culture (i.e., language learners' own culture), target culture (i.e., culture where the target language is used as a first language), and international target culture (i.e., cultures that are neither a source culture nor a target culture). In an EFL context, the same classification is sometimes referred to as cultures of the inner circle, outer circle, and expanding circle (Kachru 1985). A good

number of empirical studies adopt the typology, and their findings consistently show that representations of target culture tend to dominate (e.g., Astiandani and Purwati 2021; Baleghizadeh and Shayesteh 2020; Deswila et al. 2021; Ma and Pan 2023; Nurjanah and Umaemah 2019; Shin et al. 2011). However in textbooks compiled locally, the inclusion of source culture is on the rise and sometimes even exceeds that of the target culture (e.g., Hermawan and Noerkhasanah 2012; Rashidi and Meihami 2016; Riadini and Cahyono 2021; Syahri and Susanti 2016). Other international cultures that are neither source nor target cultures are generally less represented in language textbooks (Zhang 2013; Weninger and Kiss 2013; Curdt-Christiansen and Weninger 2015). These empirical studies suggest that the cultural representations in language textbooks for either domestic or international use has shifted from a monocentric to polycentric focus in terms of the selection of cultural information, but the choices often reflect a geopolitical-power-based order (Risager 2018).

As for the dimensions or aspects of cultural contents in textbooks, researchers frequently use the coding schema proposed by Moran (2001), which includes product, practice, perspective, person, and social community (e.g., Yuen 2011). Ramirez and Hall's (1990) cultural dimensions (i.e., social, personal, religion, arts, and the humanities) are used in a few studies as well (e.g., Aliakbari and Jamalvandi 2012; Rashidi and Khosravi 2010). Others adopt the big C and small c distinction to code the cultural contents in textbooks (e.g., Adaskou et al. 1990). No matter what classification or checklist is used, a consistent finding across studies is that cultural contents in language textbooks represent more the surface culture (as defined in the iceberg metaphor of culture proposed by Hall 1976). In other words, the visible parts of a culture such as artefacts, products, and customs are often portrayed in language textbooks. What is missing from or needed in these textbooks are rich and in-depth representations of deep cultural elements such as values, beliefs, and attitudes (Irawan and Daud 2021; Jorfi et al. 2022).

In addition to specific cultural contents, some studies also evaluated the intercultural contents of textbooks (e.g., Astiandani and Purwati 2021; Li 2023; Siddiqie 2011). Byram's (1989) checklist of eight cultural dimensions is often used for this purpose (see Ariawan 2020 and Riadini and Cahyono 2021 for examples). So far, there have been no consistent findings. For example, Nugroho (2019) found that Islamic education textbooks in Indonesian not only transferred subject knowledge, but also promoted multicultural values such as tolerance, harmony, mutual respect, democracy, and maintenance of faith with good morality. However, Cho and Park (2016) found that multicultural identity, diversity and pluralism, and social justice were not well represented in current elementary and secondary textbooks of social studies, ethics, and the Korean language.

There are studies that particularly target the textbooks of intercultural communication. For example, Hu (2007) reviewed *Intercultural Communication: An Advanced Resource Book* (Holliday et al. 2004) for its applaudable non-essential treatment of culture (in comparison to other IC textbooks). Chi (2010) analyzed the bibliographies of eight intercultural communication textbooks published between 2000 and 2009 for English majors in China. She found that these textbooks focus primarily on comparing Chinese and American cultures, and lack representation of other cultures. Suo et al. (2015) mapped out the development of intercultural communication as a discipline in China by analyzing 122 IC textbooks published across thirty-three years for their cover, front and back matters, and table of contents.

None of these studies have addressed cultural representations in IC textbooks in particular except for Chang et al.'s (2006) work. They examined the depiction of East Asian cultures (specifically China, Japan, and Korea) in two popular intercultural communication textbooks: Martin and Nakayama (2007) and Samovar et al. (2007). Their aim was to see how East Asian cultures "are presented vis-à-vis images of the West (i.e., Americans)" in intercultural communication textbooks. They problematized the treatment of East Asian cultures in both textbooks as cultural others and a generic label that lead to essentialized descriptions and interpretations. Chang and her colleagues criticized cultural representation in IC textbooks for the sake of representation and cautioned that such representation may create more stereotypes and is contrary to the goal of intercultural education. Almost

two decades have passed since the publication of that study, if cultural representation in IC textbooks has continued to be the same or changed in some way is worth investigating.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample IC Textbooks

In this study, we define textbooks of intercultural communication as educational materials that are written systematically, published publicly, treat intercultural communication as an independent field of study, and the major subject of teaching. We used the maximum variation sampling strategy (Douglas 2022, p. 418) with an aim to capture a wide range of features of IC textbooks in terms of their popularity, disciplinary perspective, conceptualization of culture, and authorship.

Eight textbooks are sampled from a total of ~750 available (about 1%) according to a search of IC textbooks on the Amazon bookstore website. These textbooks are marketed for both domestic and international audiences. They are all popular ones with good ratings by customers. They are written by scholars from applied linguistics and communication science, representing two major disciplinary perspectives of intercultural communication. Conceptualizations of culture in these textbooks vary considerably, ranging from the socio-scientific approach (which casts an analytical and static lens on cultural contents); to the interpretative approach (which focuses on providing contextual information and explanations for intercultural interactions); and to the critical approach (which acknowledges the dynamic and heterogeneous nature of culture and the omnipresence of power difference). They reflect the gradual development of understanding of culture in the field of intercultural communication (Baldwin 2017). We purposefully chose three textbooks (2, 5, 6) written by Chinese immigrant scholars in America, Britain, and Australia. Some authors of another two textbooks (3, 4) also have substantial exposure to the Chinese culture due to work affiliations.

3.2. Content Analysis Procedure

An extensive combing of the textbooks was conducted to find occurrences of Chinese culture. It was firstly performed electronically through keyword search (using words such as "China/Chinese", "Taiwan/Taiwanese", "Hong Kong", "Confucian/Confucius", etc.) and later double checked manually by all three authors to ensure a complete coverage. The length of such occurrences can range from a few words to a few paragraphs.

Content analysis was conducted using NVivo 12. For the first round, all occurrences of Chinese culture were marked as independent incidents in each textbook (see the last column in Table 1 for their frequency).

Table 1. Sample textbooks of intercultural communication.

	IC Textbooks	Total Pages	Incidents of Chinese Culture
1	Intercultural communication: An advanced resource book for students (2nd ed., Holliday et al. 2010)	336	35
2	Understanding intercultural communication (2nd ed., Ting-Toomey and Chung 2012)	352	75
3	Intercultural communication for everyday life (Baldwin et al. 2014, eds.)	350	99
4	Introducing language and intercultural communication (Jackson 2014)	433	93
5	Exploring intercultural communication: Language in action (Zhu 2014)	280	51
6	Introducing intercultural communication: Global cultures and contexts (2nd ed., Liu et al. 2015)	385	103
7	Intercultural communication in contexts (7th ed., Martin and Nakayama 2018)	569	81
8	Intercultural communication: A critical perspective (Halualani 2019)	276	43

Three coders then worked together to pilot code approximately ten per cent of the incidents in each textbook to develop a list of initial categories. The results were discussed afterwards and criteria for subcategories in each group were clarified. Two coders then completed the remaining coding together. In case of disagreement between the two coders, the third coder would join in and resolve the difference through discussion. The final coding schema adopted is presented in Table 2.

1. Cultural content, which captures the specific domains or aspects of Chinese culture covered in the textbooks. The subcategories are based on Moran's (2001) framework for cultural contents, including products, practices, perspectives, and persons;
2. Theoretical relevance, which refers to the theoretical concepts mentioned together with Chinese culture. Widely used terms in the field of intercultural communication, such as cultural value orientation, high–low context communication styles, cultural identity, etc., are extracted from the incidents to show the link between Chinese culture and the textbook subject matter (i.e., intercultural communication);
3. Placement and function, which documents the structural location of Chinese culture and what educational purposes they serve. According to Zhang and Yu (2020), cultural contents in foreign language textbooks can appear either in the main text or non-main text (i.e., exercises after the main text). We borrow the two categories, but expand the latter to include more elements, such as in-text sections that are separated from the main text by boxes or shadows, notes, references, glossaries, etc.;
4. Co-occurrence relation, which maps out the relationship between Chinese culture and other cultures if they co-occur in the same incident. Such relations include comparison between Chinese culture and other cultures for their similarities or differences, random grouping of Chinese culture with other cultures without explicit reasoning, mixture of Chinese culture with other cultures as a result of globalization, and individual treatment of Chinese culture.

Table 2. Coding scheme with examples.

Code Category		Definition	Example
1 Cultural content	Products	Tangible or intangible artefacts produced or adopted by the members of Chinese culture, including plants, animals, clothing, buildings, music, economy, language, etc.	Establishing Confucius Institutes; . . . from Mainland China and Taiwan . . .
	Practices	Actions and interactions that the members of Chinese culture typically carry out, including forms of communication, use of products, and notions of appropriateness	In *yum cha* etiquette, it is customary. . .
	Perspectives	Beliefs, values, and attitudes that underlie the products and practices of the members of Chinese culture	In some Asian cultures, such as . . ., or Hong Kong, memorization or rote learning is the preferred pedagogy, . . .
	Persons	Individual members of the Chinese culture, including well-known icons and groups of ordinary people	Confucius was a Chinese philosopher . . .
2 Theoretical relevance	Theory	Theoretical terms that are explicitly referred to when Chinese culture is mentioned	in many major Asian or. . . cities (e.g., Shanghai, Seoul, Sao Paulo, . . ., etc.)

Table 2. *Cont.*

Code Category		Definition	Example
3 Placement and function	Main text	Chinese culture in the main body of writing	/
	Non-main text	Chinese culture in sections separated from the main texts, such as references, questions for discussion, pre-text quotes, notes, or glossary	/
	Photo	Chinese cultural symbols in photos	/
4 Co-occurrence relation	Comparison	Chinese culture appears together with other cultures in comparison.	Instead, the Chinese language . . ., which in English are. . .
	Parallel	Chinese culture appears together with other randomly mentioned cultures.	Images we have acquired about Colombia, China, Israel . . ., are often derived from. . .
	Mixed	Chinese culture appears as an integral part of a multicultural entity.	Stereotypes of Chinese–American men as. . .
	Solo	Chinese culture appears alone in the text.	Regarding her Chinese culture, ...

4. Results

4.1. Chinese Cultural Contents Covered in IC Textbooks

In total, 580 incidents of Chinese culture were identified in the sampled IC textbooks. Each incident may contain more than one aspect of cultural content, so the total number of coded items is 1384. The breakdown of these aspects shows that Chinese culture is widely represented in IC textbooks through its products (609), persons (466), practices (159), and perspectives (150).

There is a wide range of cultural products, both tangible and intangible, covered in these IC textbooks. Widely known items such as Chinese food (15), martial arts (3), music (7), and opera (2) do appear, but constitute only a small portion. Instead, Chinese language (82, including both Mandarin and dialects), media products (43), and proverbs or sayings (12) seem to take the lead in this category. This may be due to the linguistic and communication-focused interests of the textbook writers.

Most of the incidents categorized as persons refer to groups like Chinese immigrants (39, e.g., American Chinese, Canadian Chinese, Singaporean Chinese), international students (25), partners in intercultural friendship (14) or marriage (10), Taiwanese (9), Hong Kong Chinese (9), etc. Iconic figures can be seen in this list sporadically, which include both historical and modern figures, such as Confucius, Mao Zedong, President Xi Jinping, Bruce Lee (Li Xiaolong), and Jackie Chan (Cheng Long).

Items coded as cultural *practices* include specific Chinese communication styles (57), business manners (33), social etiquettes (26), pedagogy and learning (17), and relationship management (15), etc. For example, how conflicts are resolved and conversations carried on; how negotiations are conducted and what management styles are preferred; how teaching and learning styles differ from other cultures; and what to do for good *Guanxi*, parenting, and developing friendship are all possible topics that bring up the Chinese cultural context in the sampled IC textbooks.

The last aspect, cultural perspectives, is about Chinese cultural beliefs (21), values (28), rules and norms (15). The most frequently mentioned items in this category include Confucianism (35), Taoism (14), and face concept (9).

In addition to these four Ps classification, a special code theory is also used to mark the representation of Chinese culture in IC textbooks. Interestingly, almost half of the incidents (225 out of 580) have some theoretical bearing. This indicates that a main function of cultural contents in IC textbooks is for contextualizing theories. Moreover, there seems to exist some consensus about the theoretical concepts that are expected to be associated

with Chinese culture. For example, Chinese culture is referred to in all eight textbooks under the topics of cultural identity, stereotype, and prejudice, which are fundamental constructs of intercultural communication. Also, Chinese culture is frequently referred to as a typical example in binary contrast between the East and the West in terms of cultural value dimensions, such as collectivism–individualism (in six textbooks), power distance (in four textbooks), high-/low- contexts (in three textbooks), and long-term or short-term orientations (in two textbooks). This echoes with Chang et al.'s (2006) observation about representation of East Asian culture in two selected IC textbooks.

With regard to how culture can be conceptualized differently in textbook representations, we selected three typical examples to illustrate the possible range:

(1) "*East Asians and Asian Americans, such as Chinese, Japanese, and Indians, are members of low contact cultures.*" (Ting-Toomey and Chung 2012)

(2) "*With observation, we can discover that seemingly small pieces of talk can display the planned and identification-seeking quality of rhetorical interactions. At a U.S. university, a graduate student from X'ian, China, records her voicemail message to end with 'See 'ya.'*" (Baldwin et al. 2014)

(3) "*Ming said that there were different ways of looking at this. On the one hand, it could not be denied that Confucianism had been a very powerful influence on Chinese society for thousands of years. On the other hand, not everyone had to be bound by this influence; and different people could be influenced in different ways.*" (Holliday et al. 2010)

It can be seen that when Chinese culture is presented without specific content, but as a generic label (1), it reflects a static and simplistic view of culture. When more detailed descriptions of people and actions (2), in-depth explanations of cultural behaviours or thoughts (3) are provided, the conceptualization of culture becomes more sophisticated and less essentialized.

4.2. Ways of Representing Chinese Culture in IC Textbooks

With an understanding of what content of Chinese culture is represented in IC textbooks, we can take a further step to see how this information is organized and presented. We adopted two perspectives to address the second research question. One is to see where the incidents of Chinese culture appear (in the main text or in peripheral parts?). The other is to see what the relationship is between Chinese culture and other cultures (if any) that appear in the same incident.

As expected, over 75% of the cultural incidents appear in the main text of IC textbooks. They can be further categorized into three ways of representation.

1. Simple mention. In these incidents, Chinese culture is often presented as one in a list of various cultures (94). Such representation provides no context but a coarse link between a particular cultural trait and cultural groups associated with it. For example, "*However, there are some exceptions, especially in East Asia, where Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore appear to retain collectivism despite industrialization.*" (Ting-Toomey and Chung 2012);

2. Brief description. Incidents that are presented as standalone examples (251) are the most common ways found in these IC textbooks for cultural representation. They tend to provide slightly more background information that provides better understanding of the cultural products, practices, or perspectives of China. For example, "*In southern regions of China, the gifts that the groom's parents give to the bride's family often include two coconuts. In the Chinese language, the word 'coconut' is similar in sound to the words 'grandfather and son'. Thus, the gift of coconuts symbolizes a wish for both the longevity of the family's older generations and the ongoing presence of the younger generations, as an extended family of three or four generations is treasured in Chinese culture.*" (Liu et al. 2015);

3. Elaborated explanation. Although there are only 32 incidents coded in this category, they are generally the longest ones. They differ from the previous two types of representation in that more details about the contexts are offered and accompanied by analytical explanations. For example, an analytical explanation would look like

this: "*Assuming that the leader did not understand him, the interpreter interrupted the leader and gave specific and somewhat patronising instructions on how to make self-introduction. This took the leader by surprise, but he gave in. In the next few turns, he managed to give his self-introduction with cues from his fellow businessmen. The question is: was the interpreter's intervention necessary or appropriate? At that time, for the Chinese delegation, self-introduction was not their priority. They were more concerned about saying a few words of appreciation out of courtesy. This misalignment in what they wanted to do and what they were expected to do was made worse when the interpreter attempted to 'regulate' the interaction. The example shows that although interpreters are obliged to clarify misunderstandings and to facilitate interactions, what is to be clarified and how to facilitate interactions are a matter of negotiation and discretion.*" (Zhu 2014)

Besides cultural representation in the main text, references, discussion questions, pre-text quotes, notes, and glossaries can also contain incidents of Chinese culture, but the information they offer is either repetitive (as cited already in the main text) or less influential (as prompts for further thought). However, the fact that 141 references are coded out as knowledge sources for the Chinese cultural incidents is worth mentioning. This indicates that cultural representation in IC textbooks is fairly informed by research conducted in this field.

Next, we look at the relationship between Chinese culture and other cultures that appear in the same context. Only 28% of the incidents refer to Chinese culture alone, without mentioning any other culture. For the rest, Chinese culture is mostly presented either in contrast to (134), similar to (74), or simply parallel to (126) other cultures. The parallel relationship is of less analytical value, as the co-occurrence of other cultures with Chinese culture is coincidental and does not suggest any meaningful or logical connections. The last type of relationship is coded as mixed, which highlights the interaction and coexistence of different cultures that is increasingly common in today's world. In these cases, Chinese culture is referred to as an integrated part of a multicultural whole (94).

5. Discussion

In this study, we addressed two questions about cultural representation in IC textbooks using Chinese culture as a focal case. The findings show that IC textbooks cover a wide range of cultural aspects in general, namely, the artefacts, languages, mannerisms, values, norms, public figures, and signature places of China. These aspects are presented in the main texts of the IC textbooks with different levels of specificity and contexts in the forms of lists, examples, and explanations. We also find that representations of Chinese culture in IC textbooks often appear together with other cultures rather than singularly.

A few differences in the coverage of cultural contents between language textbooks and IC textbooks are noticeable. First, Chinese culture, as a non-target culture, nor a source culture, is fairly covered in all sample IC textbooks. This is different from the consistently found order of cultures in language books (Zhang 2023). However, as Xiang and Yenika-Agbaw (2019) lamented, "textbooks can be replete with social, cultural, political, and economic purposes". IC textbooks, which are supposed to treat cultures in a fair manner, have hidden agendas, too. In the context of intercultural communication, an East–West dichotomy discourse prevails (though being a long-criticized stance). Thus, Chinese culture is conveniently treated as a typical example of East Asian cultures and, at the same time, as the opposite or cultural other of the West as what is pointed out in Chang, Holt, and Luo's analysis (Chang et al. 2006).

Second, the selection of cultural content presented in IC textbooks is, to some extent, theoretically guided. This is different from the often fragmented and haphazard presentation of cultures in language textbooks (Risager 2018). Relatedly, important cultural information in IC textbooks is expected to be based on the academic literature, which can be seen from the "reference" code of in-text citations. This does not seem to be a critical concern in language textbooks. There is an advantage to this type of cultural representation in terms of the validity and reliability of the information provided. However, taken as a

whole, there is also a disadvantage. The more influential a study is, the more its results are reproduced in textbooks. For example, we can see that some well-known dimensional categorizations of Chinese culture appear repeatedly in different textbooks (e.g., collectivism, high power distance, low context). Such a reproduction of knowledge could create a stereotypical image of a particular culture (Osland and Bird 2000), which is contrary to the aims of intercultural education. In addition, as previously argued, the majority of cultural contents appear in the main texts of IC textbooks, which is different from the implicit representation of culture in language textbooks (Zhang and Li 2022).

Moreover, given the disciplinary goal of intercultural communication, its textbooks place learning about cultures (including one's own and others') at the center and provide sufficient support by incorporating abundant examples and cases with explanations. This is different from the more descriptive and passing nature of cultural representation in foreign language textbooks (Zhang and Yu 2020).

Given the descriptive accounts of a fairly broad coverage of Chinese culture in IC textbooks, a further question to ask is what is still missing. As Canale (2016) points out, what is left out from textbook discourse often reveals the politics of exclusion. In this case, domestic cultural diversity in China seldom appears in the sampled IC textbooks. Most of the places or people mentioned are associated with mainstream cultures of China, which suggests an essentialist tendency towards cultural representation. However, how much specificity is desirable and manageable for writing about a particular culture in an IC textbook is difficult to decide. One way to address this challenge might be developing IC textbooks indigenously so that the local culture, which is more relevant for the intended readers, can be represented with more varieties and in depth.

To summarize, our findings suggest that there is a need for developing future IC textbooks that go beyond the East–West dichotomous contrast pattern; embed contextualized and localized cultural contents; are rich with thick descriptions of cultural perspectives and practices; and maintain a delicate balance between within- and across-cultural variances.

6. Conclusions

This study addresses the questions of what cultural contents appear and how they are represented in IC textbooks in an exploratory manner, which raises more questions for the future. For example, what cultural differences and/or similarities should be included in textbooks on intercultural communication, and in what ways are different ways of representation related to stereotypical perceptions of these cultures? Given the small number of textbooks analyzed and the narrow focus on Chinese culture only in this study, it is too early to draw any substantial conclusions nor estimate the impacts of certain issues discussed above. Future studies should attempt to use a more representative sample of textbooks, go beyond descriptive accounts, and include more cultures for an in-depth understanding of the relationship between cultural representation in IC textbooks, conceptualization of culture, and knowledge construction. As commented by Littlejohn (2011), the analysis of teaching materials is like "a process of reverse engineering" (p. 205), providing insights not only for textbook production, but also for teaching, learning, and theorizing about the subject. We hope that our study can provide some guidance, based on empirical evidence, for IC textbook writing, teaching, and theorizing from local cultural perspectives.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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