

# English foreign language learners' perceptions of cultural elements in Chinese EFL textbooks

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**ABSTRACT:** Our study aims to culturally analyze the textbook series for English as a Foreign Language Learner (EFL) Senior High School learners in the context of China using a questionnaire taken from Kilickaya (2004). To this end, 635 EFL students completed a questionnaire. In addition, 31 students were randomly selected for a semi-structured interview. The results of the study indicated that students' perceptions of the meaning and objectives of textbooks were found to be positive. The findings showed that the teaching aids did a good job of presenting various perceptions from the students' points of view. Students felt that the textbooks represented diverse societies and were relevant to their home culture, but they felt that the manuals were less effective in presenting the values of social groups. The results from the quantitative section of the study also indicated that there is a positive significant relationship between cultural materials and activities, as well as the teachers' aids and objectives. The results demonstrated that placing images in line with the text can help learners become familiar with the target language as the pictures can trigger their comprehension. Based on the qualitative results, it can be concluded that EFL textbooks for language learners in China are mainly composed of relationships between texts, pictures, and tasks, showing a focus on denotative meaning. Ultimately, the outcomes of this inquiry provide practical implications for EFL stakeholders.

**Keywords:** cultural elements, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), learner perception, textbook evaluation

## Percepciones de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera sobre los elementos culturales representados en los libros de texto chinos de ILE

**RESUMEN:** Nuestro estudio tiene como objetivo analizar culturalmente la serie de libros de texto para estudiantes de secundaria de inglés como estudiante de lengua extranjera (EFL) en el contexto de China utilizando un cuestionario tomado de Kilickaya (2004). Con este fin, 635 estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera completaron un cuestionario. Además, 31 estudiantes fueron seleccionados aleatoriamente para una entrevista semiestructurada. Los resultados del estudio indicaron que las percepciones de los estudiantes sobre el significado y los objetivos de los libros de texto fueron positivas. Los hallazgos mostraron que los materiales didácticos hicieron un buen trabajo al presentar diversas percepciones desde los puntos de vista de los estudiantes. Los estudiantes sintieron que los libros de texto representaban sociedades diversas y eran relevantes para su cultura de origen, pero sintieron que los ma-

nuales eran menos efectivos para presentar los valores de los grupos sociales. Los resultados de la sección cuantitativa del estudio también indicaron que existe una relación significativa positiva entre los materiales y actividades culturales, así como las ayudas y objetivos de los docentes. Los resultados demostraron que colocar imágenes en línea con el texto puede ayudar a los alumnos a familiarizarse con el idioma de destino, ya que las imágenes pueden desencadenar su comprensión. Sobre la base de los resultados cualitativos, se puede concluir que los libros de texto de EFL para estudiantes de idiomas en China se componen principalmente de relaciones entre textos, imágenes y tareas, lo que muestra un enfoque en el significado denotativo. En última instancia, los resultados de esta investigación brindan implicaciones prácticas para las partes interesadas de EFL.

**Palabras clave:** Elementos culturales, inglés como lengua extranjera, percepción del alumno, evaluación de libros de texto

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Chinese educational system requires students to take part in English courses offered at different levels, ranging from primary to university level (Zhang & Wang, 2011). Undoubtedly, the emergence of English as an international language or lingua franca entails a reconsideration of the role of the cultural component in EFL classes on the part of scholars, language professionals, and experts (Kramsch & Zhu, 2016). Indeed, there is a close interrelationship between language and culture (Roiha & Sommer, 2021; Thumvichit, 2018). For instance, a majority of scholars stipulate that culture encompasses a composite of symbolic systems (e.g., knowledge, convictions, customs, rituals, and traditions, along with behaviors and skills acquired by members of a given community) (Kramsch & Zhu, 2016; Tolosa et al., 2018). The content of books needs to incorporate multicultural norms to raise learners' awareness of cultural diversity in language teaching and learning (Derakhshan, 2018; Nomnian, 2013). Nowadays, books and textbooks are more pictorial than before as using pictures in books can enhance the learning process as images in books can inspire learners' attention, permitting them to be engaged in second language (L2) learning (Pishghadam et al., 2021; Weninger, 2018). As far as the development of English materials is concerned, pictures have proved to be essential in improving the teaching and learning of the target language (Derakhshan, 2021; Elmiana, 2019). According to Xiong and Hu (2022), the content of textbooks significantly impacts students' attitudes toward other people, the target community, and even themselves. Consequently, EFL textbooks need to take into account various cultural perspectives and cultural components so that students can figure out different cultural perspectives and values (Shin et al., 2011).

Some investigations have been conducted on the application of images for raising learners' awareness of cultural components in EFL classrooms (e.g., Derakhshan, 2021; Kiss & Weninger, 2017; Krčelić & Skledar Matijević, 2015; Wang & Hemchua, 2022). In consequence, there has been an increase in the use of pictures in society for various purposes. Furthermore, pictures contained in EFL textbooks facilitate the development of language skills as they can convey messages. Derakhshan (2021) assessed an EFL textbook used in Iran from the perspective of learners, teachers, and teacher educators. The findings showed that although the textbooks contained some multicultural elements, the texts, the activities, and the pictures of the EFL textbook (Vision 1, a coursebook in Iran) failed to make learners ready to face the cultural realities of the modern world where multilingual-

ism and multiculturalism are dominant. Indeed, the texts, assignments, and visuals were not significantly connected to current cultural significance, and there was not a high-quality exchange between the students, textbook, and instructor for constructing and reconstructing cultural meaning. However, such examination, particularly of language textbooks, is still in its early stages in China, even though China has a large number of English learners, with L2 learning heavily relying on textbooks (Liu, 2013). Indeed, the examination of English language textbooks began to catch the attention of Chinese researchers in 2000 (Huang & Yu, 2009). It should be noted that no inclusive investigation has examined how culture is incorporated into the textbooks used in Chinese senior high schools. Given the remarkable role of culture in the literature (Xiong & Hu, 2022), the current study analyzes cultural elements considering potential ways of meaning-making processes. Therefore, this study aims to investigate Chinese EFL learners' perceptions of cultural elements in their textbooks. In this regard, these research questions were posed:

RQ1: What are Chinese learners' attitudes toward cultural elements represented in the Chinese EFL textbook series by The People's Education Press (PEP)?

RQ2: How do Chinese EFL learners view the cultural representations of the Chinese EFL textbook series by PEP?

## 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### 2.1. EFL textbooks

Textbooks are written manuscripts employed generally for the learning/teaching procedure at school (Simatupang et al., 2013). A textbook has a basic role in legitimizing several communal activities improved by the schooling procedure and transferring communal beliefs (Xiong & Hu, 2022). Considering a textbook as an organized form of information, it handles a set of certain topics in a particular area. EFL textbooks are described as published material aimed specifically at helping L2 learners enhance their linguistic and communicative skills (Teo & Kaewsakul, 2016). EFL textbooks play an important role in enhancing cultural and global citizenship ideas; moreover, they serve as cultural vehicles and artifacts (Gray, 2000). Indeed, EFL textbooks serve as sociocultural vehicles, seen as outcomes of complex selection processes representing various perspectives including political, educational, and cultural realities and language policies (Curd-Christian & Weninger, 2015). As stated by Cortazzi and Jin (1999), textbooks play a crucial role in an EFL classroom, particularly as educators, guides, material, mentors, experts, and belief systems. To state it differently, English instructors must assess the cultural material of the textbook they utilize as it can influence the comprehension of foreign culture for EFL learners.

### 2.2. Language and culture

According to Wei (2005), language has a two-fold nature: one as a tool for communication and the other as a conduit for culture. It is impossible to have language without culture, just as it is impossible to have human culture without language. Tomlinson (2008) argues

that when teaching culture in EFL classes, it is important to consider cultural knowledge, cultural values, cultural behavior, and cultural skills, utilizing the English language as a medium for interaction. The association between language and culture is the other cultural dimension that is modified over time, which is complicatedly intertwined, therefore, educating and learning a language necessarily encompasses educating and learning its culture (Risager, 2023). The realization of cultural knowledge in language acquisition is referred to as intercultural competence, which signifies the fundamental knowledge that proficient EFL learners gain through culturally and linguistically integrated English language materials presented in the textbooks (Türkan & Çelik, 2007).

As stated by Majitova (2023), language is an intellectual and non-instinctive way of conveying thoughts, feelings, and demands through willingly generated symbols. Indeed, language and culture are interdependent; the capability of using a language indicates the capability of comprehending the viewpoint, behaviors, and lifestyles of its native people. Language and culture are an inseparable combination, particularly in the realm of language acquisition and instruction as the presence of culture is evident in language itself. Language is a component of our description of culture as well as a reflection of our culture that is fundamentally tied to numerous different concepts learned in EFL courses (Muminovna, 2023). Indeed, languages indicate the culture of a community group, and speaking a language presumes a culture (Kayman, 2004). However, the inclusion of culture in EFL textbooks is a matter of debate (Alshenqeeti, 2020; Xiang & Yenika-Agbaw, 2021). In addition, the lack of national and global cultural aspects in EFL textbooks may result in certain misinterpretations during the interaction. This could diminish students' proficiency in expressing and comprehending efficiently in appropriate circumstances through textbooks (Lee, 2018). Textbooks globally vary in cultural perspectives; namely, they are influenced by the culture of the learners, the culture where the target language is spoken, or the cultures of different English-speaking or non-English-speaking countries where English is used as a global language (Aliakbari, 2004).

### 2.3. Related studies

Weninger and Kiss (2013) examined the combination of text, image, and task in two EFL series in Hungary. The results indicated that meaning-making was facilitated in a guided manner in the textbooks as there was a relationship between pictures and texts. An evaluation was conducted by Salehi and Amini (2016) on English textbooks for learners in Iran. The sample included 150 teachers and 200 learners. Three tasks were set and two questionnaires developed by the researchers were employed. Textbooks were evaluated on eight key factors: structure and shape, content, goals, language type, skills, activities and tasks, cultural values, and teacher's requirements. Through the questionnaires, quantitative data were gathered, and outcomes were found to be most favorable for teachers and learners in various parts of the book. The results of the study also indicated no significant difference between the attitudes of Iranian high school teachers and learners. Also, in their study, Syahri and Susanti (2016) investigated the degree to which both the source and target cultures are depicted within EFL textbooks. The findings revealed that the local cultures were more prevalently depicted as compared to the target cultures. More specifically, five books out of the nine English textbooks explored in the study included materials and examples associated

with local cultures. Thumvichit (2018) examined cultural representations in English textbooks used in Thai high schools. The results indicated that even though educators recognized the significance of incorporating intercultural elements in English language teaching (ELT), the course books predominantly featured Anglophone cultures. The course books lacked representation of Thai cultures in the reading-focused exercises, with only a small number of images related to Thailand being found.

Recently, Derakhshan (2021) conducted a qualitative analysis focusing on the relationship between three elements, namely, text, image, and task, exploring their capacity for creating and recreating cultural meanings concerning the Iranian EFL textbook based on the perceptions of Iranian EFL learners, instructors, and teacher educators. The results of the thematic analysis revealed the presence of three key themes. Firstly, it was observed that the co-occurrence of both the image and the text was predominantly governed by an indexical relation. Secondly, a noteworthy observation was the absence of significant emphasis on cultural awareness and its associated connotations. Finally, the textual and visual issues signifying the intercultural meanings and interpretations failed to sufficiently adhere to the tasks. The individuals who were interviewed expressed their recommendation for the inclusion of culturally interesting images within the textbooks.

### **3. METHOD**

#### **3.1. Participants**

The original population of the present study was 672 senior high school EFL learners who participated in the regular EFL classes in Henan Province, and Hebei Province on the Chinese mainland. However, due to the collected valid questionnaires, the final sample who completed the questionnaires completely included 635 participants, consisting of 380 females and 255 males, and the learners' ages ranged from 15 to 43. In addition, 31 students were randomly selected to take part in an interview: 22 females and 9 males.

#### **3.2. Instruments**

This study follows a mixed-methods research design and consistent with the purposes of this research, a questionnaire for the quantitative phase and a semi-structured interview for the qualitative phase were employed as the instruments of the study.

To measure the representation of cultural elements, we used the questionnaire from Kilickaya (2004), with 25 items about cultural elements (Appendix A). The questionnaire is a Likert-scale type, written in bilingual versions (both English and Chinese) and it comprises a measurement scale that encompasses a range of five expressions, spanning from complete agreement (5) to total disagreement (1). The items of the questionnaire consisted of four main categories, namely, Rationale and Objectives, Cultural Materials, Class Activities, and Cultural Activities, and Teaching Aids: Illustrations, Exercises, Workbook, and Supplementary Materials. The internal reliability was assessed utilizing Cronbach's Alpha, resulting in a coefficient of .83.

Moreover, a semi-structured interview with six questions was employed regarding participants' perceptions of the cultural elements in the Chinese EFL textbooks for senior

high schools based on the cultural elements examined in the questionnaire (Appendix B). The researcher used organized interview questions, with some follow-up questions as needed, in line with a prior study conducted by Derakhshan (2021), in which these instruments were validated. Each participant was interviewed individually, and the time allocated to the interview was about 20 minutes. It is worth mentioning that the interviews were conducted in English and all recorded interviews were transcribed. The students were asked to answer the interview questions based on the following image extracted from their coursebook.

### \*Project: Design your own restaurant

In this project, you are going to make a plan for a new restaurant in your city.

#### 1 In groups, discuss these questions.

- What kind of restaurant will it be, e.g., fine dining, casual family, or fast food?
- What kind of cuisine will you serve?
- Who will be your customers?
- How much will you charge?
- Where will the restaurant be located?
- ...

#### 2 Divide the following tasks within your group:

- decide on the dishes to be served and the chef to be employed
- design the menu in both English and Chinese
- design the kitchen
- design the dining area and decorations
- give the restaurant a name and design advertising materials for it
- work as a manager to help everyone coordinate their ideas and activities



#### 3 Now pull everything together to make a presentation to the class, where the key aspects of the restaurant will be explained by the different members of the group.

#### 4 As a class, vote on the best restaurant.

Figure 1. Example extracted from volume 2, unit 3, 'Food and Culture' (Liu & Zheng, 2020, p. 35).

The image illuminates the restaurant and its designs. One of the rich sources of socio-cultural practices and linguistic conventions is food menus that are greatly supplemented either textually or visually. That is, restaurant menus are chosen for food photos, and industries are employed expansively by publishers to publicize and improve either their cultures or products. The image is a mixture of cultures. There are two characters: a Chinese/Asian woman and an Italian/European man who seems quite good at making pizza. It's a restaurant named Beijing Pizza and its decoration is quite traditional. The name "Beijing Pizza" reflects a Chinese and Western fusion. However, it sells pizza, a Western cuisine. The Chinese girl is the waitress, and she brings the food in her roller skates. Besides, she is wearing a Qipao "a loose-fitting, trapezoidal-cut garment", which is quite Chinese.

### 3.3. Data collection

At the beginning of the study, consent was obtained from all participants before they completed the survey. No conflicts of interest existed between the participants and researchers. Those who accepted to take part in the study were asked to complete the questionnaire. Beforehand, participants were informed of the aim of the investigation and were assured that their answers would be confidential. Data collection was carried out in one session and the process of data collection lasted three weeks. Lastly, some students were selected randomly for the interview.

### 3.4. Data analysis

The quantitative data collected were analyzed via SPSS 24 software. The aim was to obtain learners' perceptions of English cultural elements. Moreover, regarding the qualitative data, the responses were recorded and transcribed in detail and categorized for preliminary coding. The interview analysis was conducted using open coding, generating categories, and then progressing to abstraction (Dey, 2003). To this end, all the interview transcripts of the students were coded inductively. In doing so, the researcher made every effort to include as many codes as possible, closely aligning with the data to accurately represent the participants' own viewpoints. This coding approach is known as emic coding, in which researchers derive the meanings directly from the participants' perspectives and the cultural context. The coding process is firmly rooted in the collected data of every study (Peterson, 2017).

## 4. RESULTS

To address the first research question, learners' responses to the questionnaire were reported as follows.

### 4.1. Rationale and Objectives

The first component of the questionnaire aimed to capture learners' perceptions about the rationale and objectives of the textbooks. The learners' answers ( $n=635$ ) to each statement

are presented in Table 1 below. The statements with the highest mean were “The textbook suggests some roles for teachers in teaching” and “The textbook introduces the target language culture”, while the one with the lowest mean was “The textbook does not include generalizations about the culture”. Overall, the average mean value of 3.69 indicates that learners’ perceptions of the rationale and objectives of the textbooks were positive (over the expected mean of 3).

**Table 1.** *Learners’ perceptions of Chinese textbooks: Rationales and objectives*

Items	Mean	SD	Asymp. Sig.	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
1	3.70	.83	.000	44 (6.9%)	174 (27.4%)	<b>417 (80%)</b>
2	3.55	.91	.000	79 (12.5%)	191 (30.1%)	365 (57.5%)
3	3.87	.84	.000	38 (25.9%)	118 (18.6%)	<b>479 (75.4%)</b>
4	3.87	.81	.000	42 (2.1%)	99 (15.6%)	<b>494 (77.8%)</b>
5	3.45	.93	.000	97 (15.3%)	208 (32.8%)	330 (52%)
Average Total	3.69	.64				

The results of Table 1 showed that about 80 percent of the learners agreed that the textbook gives information, instruction, or suggestions about how the book may be used and how the cultural context may be handled. Seventy-six percent of the learners agreed that the textbook suggests some roles for teachers in teaching. The results of item 4 showed that about 78 percent of the learners agreed that the textbook introduces the target language culture.

#### 4.2. Cultural materials

Table 2 presents the learner’s perceptions of the cultural materials in the textbooks. Among the statements, providing a balanced view of world cultures and including a variety of cultures had the highest mean values, while students believed that “The cultural information is not presented with comments such as being good or bad”. The average value for all items except items 13 and 17 was above the expected value of 3. This was also the case for the total average score indicating a positive view of participants concerning this category. The results demonstrated that the cultural language that is employed in the textbooks is understandable for all students. Moreover, more than 50 percent of the participants agreed that the textbooks provide cultural materials in their lessons. The highest percentages were for items 19 and 20. The participants believed that the textbooks provide a balanced view of world culture and engage learners in cultural topics.



**Table 2.** *Learners' Perceptions of the Chinese Textbooks: Cultural materials*

Items	Mean	SD	Asymp. Sig.	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
6	3.74	.776	0.00	36 (5.8%)	168 (26.5%)	430 (67.7%)
7	3.93	.833	0.00	44 (6.9%)	79 (12.4%)	<b>512 (80.6%)</b>
8	3.83	.785	0.00	33 (5.2%)	134 (21.1%)	468 (73.7%)
9	3.80	.810	0.00	47 (7.4%)	122 (19.2%)	466 (73.4%)
10	3.84	.854	0.00	56 (8.9%)	99 (15.6%)	480 (75.6%)
11	3.63	.920	0.00	84 (13.2%)	146 (23.0%)	405 (63.8%)
12	3.90	.810	0.00	45 (7.1%)	82 (12.9%)	508 (80%)
13	3.00	1.187	0.00	261 (41.1%)	117 (18.4%)	257 (40.5%)
14	3.69	.84	0.00	44 (7%)	191(30.1%)	400 (63%)
15	3.69	.88	0.00	65 (10.2%)	147 23.1%	423 (66.6%)
16	3.90	.78	0.00	36 (5.8%)	97 (15.3%)	502 (79%)
17	1.97	.74	0.00	521 (72.1%)	95 (15.0%)	19 (3%)
18	3.70	.86	0.00	56 (9%)	164 (25.8%)	414 (65.2%)
19	4.05	.72	0.00	16 (2.5%)	80 (12.6%)	<b>539 (84.9%)</b>
20	3.97	.78	0.00	32 (5.1%)	79 (12.4%)	<b>524 (82.5%)</b>
Average Total	3.64	.51				

Three items with the highest frequency and percentage are bolded in Table 2. The results of Table 2 reveal that about 81 percent of the participants believed that the textbook promotes active student participation to communicate different values (i.e. mannerisms and courtesy); about 85 percent of them believed that it provides a balanced view of world culture, and about 83 of them believed that the textbook engages learners in cultural topics.

### 4.3. Class activities and cultural activities

The next component of the questionnaire aimed to capture participants' views about class activities and cultural activities. Table 3 reports the descriptive statistics obtained from the items under this category. Once again, the total average mean was above 3, indicating a positive perception of this category. The results also revealed that learners had a positive view of the class activities and cultural activities in the textbooks. More than 70 percent of the learners agreed that textbooks provide opportunities for learners to use their language ability to discuss cultural issues. However, the participants seemed to believe that the opportunity to employ language proficiency to discuss cultural issues is given more to them than to take part in activities that represent the foreign culture.

**Table 3.** *Learners’ Perceptions of Chinese Textbooks: Class Activities and Cultural Activities*

Items	Mean	SD	Asymp. Sig.	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
21	3.70	.99	0.00	97 (15.3%)	77 (12.1%)	<b>461 (72.6%)</b>
22	3.39	1.13	0.00	161 (25.4%)	101 (15.9%)	373 (58.8%)
Average Total	3.54	.96				

The results of Table 3 indicate that about 73 percent of the participants believed that learners are given opportunities to use their language ability to discuss cultural issues.

**4.4. Teaching aids: Illustrations, exercises, workbook, and supplementary materials**

The final component in the learners’ questionnaire was teaching aids. The descriptive statistics of the learners’ perceptions are indicated in Table 4. As reported the average mean value was above the expected value of 3. Learners believed that the teaching aids do well in representing different cultures and are appropriate to their native culture. Nearly, 80 percent of the learners believed that the characters in the textbooks represent different nationalities, countries, and the local society.

**Table 4.** *Learners’ Perceptions of Chinese Textbooks: Teaching aids*

Items	Mean	SD	Asymp. Sig.	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
23	3.78	.811	0.00	44 (6.6%)	134 (21.1%)	459 (72.3%)
24	3.90	.753	0.00	26 (4.1%)	103 (16.2%)	<b>506 (79.7%)</b>
25	3.56	.916	0.00	72 (11.4%)	198 (31.2%)	365 (57.5%)
Average Total	3.74	.71				

The results of Table 4 represent that about 80 percent of the participants believed that the characters in the textbook represent different nationalities, countries, and local societies.

**4.5. Interview results**

The first interview question was “From Chinese EFL students’ points of view, what does the image (in Figure 1) represent?” The analysis of the learner’s responses to this question resulted in the following themes, which are shown in Table 5. The majority of students stated that the image illustrated the restaurant management techniques and restaurant qualities.

**Table 5.** *Results of Thematic Analysis for the First Question*

	Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Image	Restaurant management techniques	14	45%
	Restaurant qualities	9	29%
	Presentation task	4	13%
	Creativity task	2	6%
	Discussion task	2	6%

This question tried to consider the relationship between the image and text. The majority of students stated that this image conveyed restaurant management techniques and restaurant qualities. As student 14 stated:

*“This picture visually shows the whole process of the operation of the pizzeria, showing every detail in the store, and the close connection between the various pictures fully shows the food culture of the pizzeria.”*

Or student 1 pinpointed that:

*“This image represents cooking or delicious food. Because there’s a kitchen and restaurant in the picture. And the girl is holding a pizza, the woman is cooking in the kitchen.”*

The second question was “From Chinese EFL students’ points of view, to what extent is the image related to vocabulary, listening, speaking, reading, and presentation tasks?”

The analysis of students’ answers to the second question culminated in three major themes listed in Table 6. The majority of participants perceived the image as strongly related to the specific tasks presented in the text while some students also believed that it was somehow related to these tasks. The learners contended that a lack of correlation existed between the image and task, both within and among them.

**Table 6.** *Results of thematic analysis for the second question*

	Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Image	To a great extent	23	74%
	To some extent	6	19%
	Not related	2	7%

The majority of learners perceived that all questions in this image were related to the presentation task “types of tasks that should be done in pairs or groups like pairwork or discussion”. For instance, student 17 explained that:

*“The picture is about the restaurant. The picture of decorations, the kitchen, and the dishes to be served are all given. That makes me think of my idea of creating my own restaurant and decorating it by myself. So it is related to the presentation task.”*

Or student 8 stated:

*“In this image, students are asked to discuss the questions about the restaurant design project in groups, gather their thoughts in a broad sense, and finally show the group results in class, which can boost students’ ability to make presentations.”*

The third question was “From Chinese EFL students’ points of view, to what extent does the image help students answer the follow-up questions (presented in the image)?”

The evaluation of the students’ answers to the third question yielded three themes, which are outlined in Table 7. More than half of the respondents perceived this image to be of great help to students in answering the follow-up questions. As student 6 stated:

*“The question is detailed. Students may be confused about the answers and don’t know how to answer. But the image gives students room to imagine and discuss.”*

Some of the pupils (16%), on the other hand, declared that the image did not greatly influence their answers to the follow-up questions. As student 15 pinpointed:

*“I think the pictures can help me answer some questions, but not all of them. because there is a menu both in Chinese and English, a kitchen with a chef and a pizza, and a restaurant’s exterior decoration. As for the targeted customers, the price, the location of a restaurant, and how to work as a manager, I cannot find the answer to these questions.”*

A few respondents also articulated that the image was not helpful for students at all (10%).

**Table 7.** Results of Thematic Analysis for the Third Question

	Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Image	To a great extent	23	74%
	To some extent	5	16%
	Not related	3	10%

The fourth question was “From Chinese EFL students’ points of view, is there any relation between and across the image, text, and task?” The analysis of students’ perceptions regarding the associations between images, text, and tasks culminated in the following theme (Table 8), with the majority of students perceiving images, text, and tasks to be closely related to each other. For example, student 5 stated:

*“These pictures, presentation, and tasks are all about “opening a restaurant”. The pictures provide a way of thinking for presentation and tasks, reduce the difficulty of presentation and tasks, and broaden students’ thinking.”*

**Table 8.** *Results of Thematic Analysis for the Fourth Question*

	Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Image	"Image-presentation-task" close connection	26	84%
	"Image-presentation-task" no connection	5	16%

Regarding the fifth question, "If there were no pictures, would you be able to answer the questions? Why?", most students believed that the picture was necessary to answer the questions, as student 23 stated that the questions are designed in a way that needs pictures.

*"The response time may be extended without photos because these pictures can quickly help me think of some content about the layout of the restaurant, can help me better think of good ideas of the answer to the question."*

Or student 6 stated that:

*"This image is equivalent to giving the answers to these questions, is equivalent to giving an example, and gives me a way of thinking to answer the questions. Without this image, I feel it is difficult to start to answer these questions."*

However, a few students believed that they could do the tasks without a picture. For example, as student 7 declared:

*"Students without pictures can answer questions, but they can't lay the groundwork in time."*

**Table 9.** *Results of thematic analysis for the fifth question*

	Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Image	Pictures support imagination	18	58%
	Pictures support creation	9	29%
	Pictures are not necessary	4	13%

Regarding the sixth question, "What other images do you think could have been included instead of this image to better understand the relationship between the image and the presentation?". Some of them stated that pictures of different restaurants (modern, traditional, Italian, and Chinese) could be added. Those pictures can give students more unique inspirations and could have helped answer the questions presented in the tasks (Figure 1). As student 1 stated:

*"I think there is no need to add other images, this image is perfect. It includes almost everything in the question."*

Or some agreed to change or modify the pictures. Student 13 explained that:

*"I think some photos about different types of cuisine can also be included."*

**Table 10.** *Results of thematic analysis for the sixth question*

	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Image	This image is perfect.	14	45%
	Different types of cuisine can also be included.	17	55%

## 5. DISCUSSION

As for the first component of the questionnaire, the findings demonstrated that the learners' perceptions of the rationale and objectives of the textbooks were positive. The items under this category concerned the textbook presentation of cultural issues, details and information, and cultural suitability. Indeed, it is revealed that textbooks provide specific instructions for cultural aspects and how to instruct them in their goals. The results of the study indicated that the textbook introduces the target language culture, which is in line with Li (2017) who stated that Chinese EFL textbooks predominantly rely on the target culture. This approach is thought to provide learners with the chance to experience genuine language use, grasp genuine phrases, engage with genuine cultural aspects, and understand the thought processes of diverse cultures. This approach aims to foster students' comprehension of different cultures.

Regarding the learners' perceptions of cultural materials, the analysis showed a balanced view of world cultures and the incorporation of various cultures, this means that textbooks are a significant source in presenting cultural information to EFL learners, as Mackey (2003) notes, cultural materials used in the EFL context should not be attributed only to cultures of native speakers but should encompass global cultures. EFL textbooks serve as an important resource in providing cultural knowledge to foreign language learners. The results are different from those in studies carried out by Syahri and Susanti (2016) and Thumvichit (2018), as they pinpointed that the textbooks were found to consider materials and examples associated with local cultures while based on the results of our study, both local and target culture are significant. As declared by McKay (2002), incorporating cultural materials in instructional resources can captivate students' interest in their origin culture, as well as the desired culture and global culture to foster an understanding of cultural varieties. The textbook, also, might advocate a balanced view of world cultures and involve students in cultural topics, which is maintained with the help of the exercises, workbook, and supplementary materials.

Regarding class activities and cultural activities, the participants of this study showed that they held positive views of such activities, believing that the opportunity to use language ability to discuss cultural issues was given more to them than being involved in activities that represent foreign cultures. One value of putting cultural content in teaching materials is to draw students' attention to their source culture, as well as the target culture to establish an awareness of cultural diversity (Derakhshan, 2018). The results support McKay's (2002) statement that emphasizes one of the principles of how cultural content ought to be managed in an EFL classroom. She highlighted that instructional resources should be created to motivate students to ponder on their own culture in connection with others, thereby assisting them in developing a feeling of cross-cultural interaction. For example, when comparing a Western restaurant with a Chinese restaurant, presents a valuable chance to enhance students' cultural consciousness regarding the disparities between Chinese culture and other cultures.

It also serves as an excellent opportunity to enhance students' capacity to think about both the culture being studied and the culture being referenced.

The final component in the learners' questionnaire elicited their perceptions of teaching aids. Learners believed that the teaching aids did well in representing different cultures and were appropriate to their native culture, while they perceived these aids to be less effective in presenting the values of social groups. This idea supports Yuen (2011) who contended that language teaching materials ought to incorporate knowledge from a multitude of cultures of English-speaking nations to enhance learners' intercultural interaction. With that being stated, rather than concentrating on the culture of a specific society, course materials should provide learners with extensive knowledge about both their own culture and various cultures, including the one associated with the language they are learning. By comparing multiple cultures, students can develop an understanding of their own cultural beliefs and gain insight into the cultural values of different societies (e.g., Alptekin, 2002).

The results of the interview indicated that based on learners' perceptions, teachers should consciously improve students' learning quality by forging interconnections among the image-text-task triad within the Chinese setting. English teachers can make use of existing materials related to image-text-tasks in books in the course and expand them culturally. In this aspect, images can show a lot of things that cannot be expressed in words, and they are more convenient for learners to understand cultural phenomena. If English teachers can make effective use of the function of images, it will be beneficial to culture-related content to a great extent and consequently do the tasks well. Indeed, from the image used in this study, localization can be seen from the menu which indicates that the restaurant is in China. Also, from this image, the types of food "pizza" indicate the target culture. In the top left corner is the menu with the dishes of the restaurant, which is a combination of Chinese and Western; in the bottom left corner is the table; in the middle is the girl acting as a waitress and the guy making the pizza; on the right is the pizza shop front. Images are effective as they illustrate many things that cannot be expressed in words, and they are more convenient for learners to understand cultural issues. If English teachers can make effective use of the function of images, it will be beneficial to elaborate more on culture-related content as the representation of cultural content in the textbooks could provide opportunities for learners to be aware of differences between countries leading to intercultural awareness.

Furthermore, it can be asserted that visual photos are beneficial for simple auditory processing and representation of objects and space. According to Stockl (2004), visuals act as a motivator and attention-getter to engage learners in the target text prior to getting the reader involved in texts with verbal information to help readers cognitively figure out the meaning. For instance, in the image used in this study, the young girl is confident and lively, and her style is lively and interesting, which helps to motivate students to participate more actively and stimulate their imagination for designing the ideal restaurant as presented in the related tasks.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Texts, descriptions, tasks, or assignments, which can be adopted and adjusted according to the learners' requirements can be provided via textbook in the class environment (Ayu,

2020; Teo & Kaewsakul, 2016). Textbooks that describe cultural information through visual, textual, and task styles tend to provide cultural information to learners not only deliberately, but also unintentionally so that learners might become international or universal citizens (Huang, 2019; Qodriani & Kardiansyah, 2018). Moreover, textbook images contribute to addressing language skills and components (Salbego et al., 2015). Concerning learners' perceptions, the average means for all components were above the average. Such results are an indication of EFL learners' awareness concerning the representation of different cultures in the teaching materials. In essence, this level of learners' cultural awareness confirms the fact that the way learners perceive culture is highly important in language teaching in general and EFL in particular. Textbooks provide knowledge regarding cultural aspects that are required when learning a language. In simpler terms, the more the textbook includes information about different cultures, the more it can encourage learners to think about cultural issues that are in line with the purpose of cultural awareness.

Notably, it can be concluded that even though learners may not have the opportunity to explicitly express their perceptions concerning cultural representation in EFL textbooks, they are quite conscious of how culture is manifested in such textbooks. Regarding the representation of local and target cultures in the textbooks, it can be deduced that the writers of the textbook should pay more attention to the crucial role that local and target cultures play in enhancing learners' ability to communicate effectively. Consequently, another noteworthy measure implemented by the Ministry of Education in China has been the integration of aspects of the desired and global desired culture into the EFL syllabus. Educators are anticipated to introduce the local culture alongside the culture of the desired language, as well as certain aspects of the global desired culture in foreign language lessons to enhance students' cultural consciousness.

In terms of implications, the enhancement of both internal and external cultures in class that extends beyond the material presented in textbooks offers valuable avenues for students to explore and broaden their critical perspectives regarding cultural prejudices and preconceptions. Indeed, representing the local culture promotes familiarity for the students in language learning. Moreover, the representation of the target culture appears to have a critical function in the comprehension and reconstruction of the text. If pupils learn to interpret and decode signs in a text, the comprehension of the target culture will be easy for them (Toprak & Aksoyalp, 2014). Therefore, book publishers should try to insert a balanced proportion of local and target cultures. English teachers can make use of existing materials related to image-text-tasks in books and expand on them culturally. Indeed, teachers could foster cultural awareness by building relations between the image-text-task triad. Also, teachers could use different types of strategies to help their students develop their intercultural awareness, including teacher guidance, providing appropriate tools and materials, and evaluating materials needed for learning activities. Also, teachers need to be culture communicators, which means being effective in communicating with those of diverse cultures and groups to master intercultural awareness (Nomnian, 2013).

It is necessary to provide learners with the opportunities to express themselves critically about their own culture and the values of other cultures, which is also important for clarifying learners' individual beliefs in intercultural interaction. It would also be helpful and informative to compare textbooks of all grade levels in more schools in China to achieve more exact and



comprehensive data. Also, to fully investigate and understand the cultural potential of EFL textbooks in China, analyzing textbooks from different perspectives is recommended to gain a comprehensive picture of the way they represent culture (Shi, 2023). Accordingly, more studies can be conducted to consider the perceptions of the teachers or teacher educators, since they are among the main stakeholders whose perceptions may affect the decisions of syllabus designers and material developers to present more effective coursebooks.

The current investigation has some limitations. First, in the case of the interviews conducted in this investigation, the size of the sample is small, and second, the number of participants is limited to public and private schools in just some provinces of China, which can potentially limit the ability to generalize the findings to large populations. The inquiry was limited to the evaluation and analysis of cultural components extracted from written texts of Chinese-English textbooks and only the analysis of students' books, not teachers' guides. This study used semi-structured interviews to explore students' perspectives, but it would be better if more instruments such as classroom observation were used in the future to confirm the results. Perhaps classroom observations could provide more reliable data for more scholars to examine critical language awareness in further inquiries.

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## 8. APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### Language and Culture Questionnaire

##### A. Rationale and Objectives

1. The textbook gives information, instructions, or suggestions about how the book may be used and how the cultural context may be handled.
2. The textbook addresses specific learners and ‘their unique characteristics
3. The textbook suggests some roles for teachers in teaching.
4. The textbook introduces the target language culture.
5. The textbook does not include generalizations about the culture (i.e. it informs the audience of the fact that what is true for one part is not necessarily true for the other parts).

##### B. Cultural Material

6. The cultural language used in the textbook is comprehensible to EFL learners.
7. The textbook promotes active student participation to communicate different values (i.e. mannerism and courtesy).
8. The cultural content includes generalizations about the target culture.
9. The textbook presents various cultural topics and themes.
10. The textbook provides cultural topics in each lesson in all units.
11. The textbook provides sufficient details and information about cultural topics.
12. The textbook includes a variety of world cultures.

13. The textbook includes just specific cultures such as American or British culture.
14. The textbook represents real target language culture not a subjective or stereotypical view.
15. The textbook does not provide any topics that might not be culturally suitable for learners in the class.
16. The textbook provides adequate coverage of a variety of people and this is not limited to 'chosen people'.
17. The cultural information is not presented with comments such as being good or bad.
18. The textbook advocates certain cultural values.
19. The textbook provides a balanced view of world culture.
20. The textbook engages learners in cultural topics.

### **C. Class Activities and Cultural Activities**

21. Learners are given opportunities to use their language ability to discuss cultural issues.
22. The cultural activities provide students with opportunities to participate in games, songs, celebrations, sports, or entertainment representative of the foreign culture.

### **D. Teaching Aids: Illustrations, Exercises, workbook & Supplementary Materials.**

23. The illustrations are self-explanatory and appropriate to learners' native culture.
24. The characters represent different nationalities, countries, and the local society.
25. The illustrations tell us about the values of the social groups.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Interview Questions**

1. From Chinese EFL students' points of view, what does the image (in Figure 1) represent?
2. From Chinese EFL students' points of view, to what extent is the image related to vocabulary, listening, speaking, reading, and presentation tasks?
3. Does this image help students answer the follow-up question?
4. Is there any relation between and across the image, presentation, and tasks?
5. If there were no pictures, would you be able to answer the questions? Why?
6. What other images do you think could have been included instead of this image to better understand the relationship between the image and the presentation?