Culture and Chinese as a Second Language (CSL) Teaching Materials: An Introduction

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Abstract
Against the background of the multilingual and multicultural turn in today's increasingly globalized world, there has been mounting scholarly interest in issues on culture and language teaching textbooks or materials in general. This introductory text first maps out some main themes and issues in the field with an emphasis on the context of Chinese as a second language (CSL) education. Key topics and issues deserving serious academic scrutiny include problematic representations of cultural groups, cultural perspectives, and cultural practices; besides, from a multicultural and citizenship education point of view, global issues such as shallow environmentalism, gender inequality, and rampant discourses of neoliberalism have also drawn attention from researchers in the field. We then give a summary of the four chapters in this Special Issue and conclude with some conceptual and methodological recommendations for future research.

Keywords
Culture, Chinese as a second language (CSL), multilingualism, multiculturalism, representation, textbooks

Language teaching textbooks, or language teaching materials in a more general sense, are an essential curricular vehicle for teachers to organize instruction and for learners to understand and appreciate the target culture in relationship with other cultures (Kramsch & Vinall, 2015; Xiong, 2012; Xiong & Qian, 2012). It was as early as in the 1980s that Luke (1989) problematized the ideological nature of cultural content in textbooks: "curricular text entails messages which convey particular values, knowledges, beliefs and understandings" (p. 53). With the rapid development of multilingual and multicultural realities in today's globalized world, issues on culture in language teaching materials have once again been in the spotlight in academic inquiry (Canale, 2016; Curdt-Christiansen & Weninger, 2015; Daghigh & Rahim, 2020; Kramsch & Vinall, 2015; Sun & Kwon, 2020; Weninger & Kiss, 2013; Xiong et al., 2022).

Some prominent themes explored in previous studies on cultural representation in language teaching materials included the representation and, more often, the under-representation of multiculturism (Chun,

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2016; Lee & Li, 2019; Setyono & Widodo, 2019), neoliberalism and neocapitalism (Bori, 2018; Gray, 2010a, 2010b; Xiong & Yuan, 2018), environmentalism（Stibbe, 2004; Xiong, 2014), gender equality (Lee, 2018), and moral education (Feng, 2019; Guo & Feng, 2015), as well as cultural marginalization (Smith, 2021). Previous studies have collectively pointed out that as a kind of cultural product, the design, circulation, and use of language teaching materials are embedded in certain social, cultural, and political contexts, reflecting and reproducing cultural knowledge and value orientations.

Against the backdrop of ideals of building a "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" and the Belt and Road Initiative, China's global influence has seen rapid growth, leading to mounting cultural and ideological debate. International Chinese education is a potential venue for teachers and students to seek cultural understanding and co-existence (Li, 2011, 2013; Ouyang & Zhou, 2016; Xiong & Peng, 2021). It has therefore become a topic of high interest to study the representation of culture in and teaching of culture with CSL materials. However, it is worth noting that despite its rich history and its close connection with Confucian ideas, Chinese culture remains relatively obscure to many, which has made it a critical issue and challenge in international Chinese education to communicate Chinese cultural values while fully recognizing the learners' own social and cultural identities (Xiong & Peng, 2021).

This special issue brings together four scholarly works conducted by a few CSL educators and researchers, many of whom are teaching on the frontlines, aiming to contribute to the discussion on the teaching of culture to students of other languages through scrutinizing the CSL teaching materials. These papers problematized different issues on the cultural representations in CSL teaching materials published worldwide, together with their own insightful suggestions offered. Each of the papers is summarized below.

Hua and Xiong's study critically examined the representation of Chinese-speaking groups in CSL textbooks produced in the United States, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Russia, and Italy. It has been found that while characters of Chinese diasporas and immigrants are widely represented in the CSL textbooks, characters of non-mainland Han Chinese (i.e., Chinese nationals in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan) and Chinese ethnic minorities are under-represented. This has led them to argue that the Chinese language should not be regarded as only associated with the cultural elements of the Chinese mainland, but as a kind of transnational and international language which has derived a variety of local forms capable of local cultural expressions. Besides, it is recommended in the chapter that conversational contexts in CSL could be more diverse by including places such as Macau, Hong Kong, Taipei, and even Hohhot, Lhasa, in addition to the familiar and even cliché representations of metropolis centers such as Beijing and Shanghai.

Geng and Gao's study pointed out issues of improper representation of cultural content in some CSL textbooks and called for a departure from didactic discourse style that are easy to bewilder foreign students. To this end, the authors argue for adopting strategies such as increasing common ground in which the cultural viewpoints of China and the west can possibly be merged. And the deeply entrenched mentality among many CSL educators in need to reflect on their discourse and change from one-dimensional propaganda to more authentic and multi-dimensional cultural discourse for more effective promotion of international understanding and communication. In addition, the authors propose to attach more importance to the use of open texts and cultural symbols whose interpretation is subject to a diversity of perspectives and polysemic discourses. The author emphasizes the importance of addressing the cultural concerns and needs of learners from different countries and regions by properly adjusting the textbooks.

Wang and Li focused on a set of CSL textbooks used in Ireland by interviewing the teachers using this set about their treatment of cultural knowledge and values therein. Their study has found that while these textbooks provide a wide array of cultural knowledge such as Chinese characters, Chinese tea, Chinese zodiac signs, Chinese martial arts, contents designed for promoting global citizenship awareness and global communication skills are relatively week. Consequently, it is mainly at the teachers' discretion

when it comes to cultural teaching regarding global citizenship. Based on these findings, the authors argued for the importance of more seriously considering the local context and local learners' profile in textbook development. Appropriate activities need to be designed to guide readers through cross-cultural comparisons and thinking. Moreover, the authors highlighted the importance of authentic materials in textbooks which can reflect the current progress as well as problems in China today.

Tan, Wu, and Huang's chapter addressed the issue of lack of cultural diversity through analyzing *Integrated Chinese (Volumes I and II)* as a case. Their analysis pointed out a dearth of visual and textual references to the diversity of ethnic minorities in China, as well as inadequate representation of multicultural diversity such as African Americans and Muslims in the concerned textbooks. The authors have suggested to rebalance the representation of cultural contents of China and the world and enhance the relevance and authenticity of the culture content of the textbooks in question. They also stressed the importance of empowering the teachers to develop and share resources beyond the textbooks by making the most of the multicultural assets brought about by the learners. In this way, the learners will be encouraged to have a deeper understanding and appreciation of their own cultural identities as well as Chinese cultural perspectives, and become better cross-cultural communicators and more sophisticated global citizens.

Thus far, these chapters have contributed important theoretical or practical insights on the design and implementation of cultural content and pedagogy in CSL textbooks, which are of immense value for the equitable goal of education for all. To recap, the ideas worthy of attention include but are not limited to the following: (1) Sound CSL materials development must break away from the traditional nation-state mindset of literacy education which is dominated by moral, political, and ideological inculcation. (2) Rather, CSL materials design and development should be informed by more international visions aiming for educating global citizens through multicultural education, and this requires us to create opportunities of cultural discussion by means of comparison, reflection, and debate. (3) CSL educators and researchers should be more creative and mindful in the representation and interpretation of aspects of Chinese cultural norms and values so that these norms and values are more intelligible and understandable to people of different cultural backgrounds. For example, while the knowledge forms dominated by Confucianism prioritize nationalist sentiments such as patriotism, textbook developers and educators could choose to relate to the same story from a different perspective which values individual self-actualization and pursuit of social justice.

To sum up, CSL practitioners and researchers must be more mindful and empathetic in the design and pedagogy of cultural teaching so that diversity will be celebrated and intercultural communicative competence be promoted. Methodologically, the four chapters in this special issue have demonstrated that content analysis, as the conventional approach to language textbooks study, can be potentially enriched by paradigms underlined by different epistemological and ontological stances such as critical discourse analysis, ethnography, and intercultural comparison. Future research on culture and CSL textbooks can benefit from more rigorous research design informed by greater width and depth of empirical data. For example, more attention can be paid to multimodal textbook discourse classroom interactions, and voices from students, teachers, publishers, and other stakeholders (Canale, 2021; Guo & Feng, 2015; Weninger, 2021; Xiong et al., 2022). Innovations in this line of research can also be made possible by focusing on CSL materials designed for various professional, occupational, and area-specific purposes.

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