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## The Transmission of Cultural Values via EFL Textbooks in China

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**Abstract** • This article examines the cultural values conveyed via texts and illustrations in EFL (English as a foreign language) textbooks currently in use in China. The large number of cultural values represented include patriotism, respect, diligence, collectivism, and equitable gender roles. These show that the national curriculum has been implemented in EFL textbooks. At the same time, the “common sense” design of textbooks also reflects textbook editors’ and writers’ cultural values.

**Keywords** • common sense, cultural value, EFL curriculum, textbook

Knowledge, especially school knowledge, is never value free. The production of school knowledge involves a selection process that underpins cultural reproduction among social groups. However, not all members of society can make their knowledge public via these groups. Michael Apple<sup>1</sup> noted that the opportunity to take part in cultural reproduction is determined by power relations. In other words, if education policy and curriculum design may be interpreted as forms of power practice involving struggles and compromises, these practices effectively give rise to knowledge that is a product of power relations.

Since school knowledge is ostensibly available to all people, it is subject to scrutiny by official bodies. The state plays a vital role in this selection activity wherever education is considered to be a means by which symbolic resources may be controlled. Basil Bernstein described the role of the state as one of the “recontextualizing agents”<sup>2</sup> in this process of

knowledge selection. However, school knowledge is not only the cultural or textual representation of dominant groups, for voices from other groups may be heard as a result of compromises. Besides the state, there are other parties involved in the production of school knowledge that act as recontextualizing agents. In the People's Republic of China (PRC), national curriculum design is under strict control as the state governs the education agenda and policymaking. Meanwhile, local educational authorities and textbook publishers are also involved in the creation of school knowledge.

In many classrooms, textbooks often act as the primary support of school knowledge. This is particularly the case in PRC, where textbooks are normally used prescriptively to guide classroom teaching. Analysis of textbooks therefore provides evidence about the nature of knowledge reproduced via schooling. The study of textbook production reveals not only “whose knowledge” is produced, but also strategies with which personnel are involved, how they navigate through various ideologies, and the power relations sustained between their agencies.

The focus here is on English as a foreign language (EFL) as a subject in primary schools in China, which has not previously been studied in detail. Evidence is derived from the analysis of two popular textbooks produced by the People's Education Press (PEP) and interviews with textbook editors. This article is partially based on the research I conducted for my doctoral dissertation<sup>3</sup> at the University of Edinburgh, which explored education policy-making in China and power relations among stakeholders.

### **EFL as a Subject in the PRC**

As Antony Giddens<sup>4</sup> and many others agree, globalization and cross-national relations have had a major impact on economies and societies.<sup>5</sup> As a result, the knowledge economy led to a rapid change in education systems. Many countries adjusted their national policies and placed

emphasis on preparing educated and adaptable workforces for economic growth.

Consequently, school curriculum reforms are designed to match this new educational aim. In order to adapt to modern economic needs, school curricula tend to prioritize acquiring higher order and more flexible skills, such as competence in a foreign language. Although some regions underscore the need to acquire Spanish and Mandarin as a foreign language, English remains the most popular means for international communication. In order to continuously acquire new knowledge and specialist skills in the future, which are crucial for today's globalized economy, the English language is being vigorously adopted in various countries and regions. English language competence is desirable for both national and individual development.

In the PRC, the learning of English has a long history. The main motivation to include English in school curricula is economic growth. English has also been regarded as necessary in order to gain access to scientific and technical information and acquire technological expertise. However, language and culture are interrelated.<sup>6</sup> Successful communication is not possible in the absence of either of these factors. Thus, the learning of a new language or a new way to use a certain language, opens a door for people to learn about a culture other than their own. On the other hand, the learning of a target language is often combined with the transmission of a related culture and cultural values. In a way, this explains why the spread of the English language in the wake of globalization is criticized as the tool of the West's new cultural imperialism.

Policymakers and educators are often alarmed by the hidden risk that the cultural values imported by the English language may threaten national cultures and political, economic, and social systems. Literature about EFL in the PRC demonstrates a similar attitude toward English as a school subject.<sup>7</sup> Historically, to a large extent, the status of English as a subject in school curricula changed substantially as the political agenda of the country increasingly

focused on anticapitalistic economic considerations.<sup>8</sup> The conflicting and shifting ideological context in Chinese society has to be taken into account for the selection of both curriculum content and pedagogical approaches. In other words, changes in the EFL curriculum were driven by China's sociopolitical climate.

In the 1960s prior to the Cultural Revolution period (from 1967 to 1976), when most school subjects were used as vehicles for propaganda, EFL was considered a tool to develop scientific and cultural knowledge. Since the launch of the Open Door Policy in 1978, the promotion of EFL has been enthusiastically endorsed by policymakers in order to respect economic considerations and the need for technological transfer from Western nations. Today, English language skills are widely recognized as an important means for acquiring technological expertise and for fostering international trade by various social actors such as policymakers, educators, and employers.

The school curriculum has been linked to promoting China's political, economic, and academic strategic planning. Evidence of this is derived from analysis of the various syllabuses, and from the fact that the EFL curriculum has been more sensitive to political shifts than other school subjects on account of the strong link between language and culture. Bob Adamson's<sup>9</sup> research shows that, historically, the EFL curriculum in Chinese schools has always been used as a vehicle for spreading ideological messages in the PRC. These ideological messages are reflected in the content of national textbooks. However, over the years, the proportion of political and moral passages in EFL textbooks has decreased. Adamson<sup>10</sup> observed that textbooks published after the Open Door Policy (after 1987) contained more moral than political messages. However, alongside the emerging trend toward the depoliticization of the content of EFL textbooks, there remains much debate about whether Western-style "moderation," which was regarded as a reflection of the cultural

values underpinning the English language, would present a risk to the integrity of Chinese culture and its political system.

As Adamson and Paul Morris have pointed out, “the sensitivity surrounding English poses particular problems for those agencies and personnel charged with designing and producing the various components of the official national curriculum, especially the syllabuses and textbooks.”<sup>11</sup> Those agencies and personnel have to navigate through often conflicting and shifting ideologies, ensuring that the EFL subject fits into the overall educational agenda in China.

To a large extent, recent changes in the field of EFL increase the complexity of curriculum and textbook development. In the past two decades, there were two major changes to the EFL curriculum in China. In 1993, the PRC launched a new EFL syllabus in which foreign languages, especially English, were described as “an important tool for making contact with other countries” and as a subject that “promotes the development of the national and world economy, science and culture.”<sup>12</sup> Here, the EFL curriculum was established with a clear economic motivation in order to meet “the needs of our Open Door Policy and to speed up socialist modernization.”<sup>13</sup> Following the launch of this syllabus, EFL in China was designed to foster “cross-cultural communicative competence.”<sup>14</sup> This trend was reflected in the national textbooks produced by the PEP press for secondary schools, as the use of communicative English in specific sociocultural contexts was emphasized.

The emphasis on communicative competence was promoted in line with the development of globalization. In the early 2000s, the PRC initiated another round of curriculum reform in which the learning of English was highly regarded from the beginning of primary education. EFL as a subject prolonged the existing communicative approach, and included further efforts to develop pupils’ cultural awareness, which includes both local culture and the culture of the target country. In a way, it increases the complexity of the

challenges faced by curriculum and textbook design agencies, as the notion of “culture” is increasingly emphasized.

To accompany this curriculum, several new national textbooks were produced by various agencies. Some foreign cultural elements such as costumes, food, and sports were added to the teaching materials. Most existing research about communicative English teaching in China focuses on challenges to pedagogy<sup>15</sup> and curriculum reform.<sup>16</sup> A few researchers have also paid attention to cultural themes in English teaching and teaching materials in secondary and higher education.<sup>17</sup> However, apart from references made by textbook writers within their reports, cultural themes in English teaching materials for primary schools have rarely been studied by researchers.<sup>18</sup> With the focus on cultural values, this research studied two volumes of EFL textbooks for primary schools, that is, *New Version English (NV English)* and *PEP Primary English (PEP English)*, which currently dominate the textbook market in China. Following this textbook analysis, interviews with textbook editors and writers were carried out in order to explore the ideas underpinning the current design.

### ***NV English and PEP English***

Both *NV English* and *PEP English* were produced by the People’s Education Press. This state-owned press is under the direct leadership of the Ministry of Education of the PRC. Until 1993, the People’s Education Press was exclusively authorized by the State Education Commission (now the Ministry of Education) to design the syllabi and textbooks for primary and secondary school subjects. Although some agencies were involved in the production of textbooks under the censorship of the Ministry of Education, the People’s Education Press dominates the textbook market for primary and secondary schools. The People’s Education Press has published fourteen volumes of nationwide EFL textbooks and teaching materials for primary and secondary education in the past sixty years. Due to its long history in

textbook publishing, it is not only regarded as a leading publisher in the textbook market, but also to a large extent the press retains its status as the official representative of the Ministry of Education.<sup>19</sup>

Both *NV English* and *PEP English* were produced in the same period following cooperative agreements between China and Singapore, and between China and Canada. These EFL textbooks were designed as interactive learning materials that include text and illustrations. They both follow a task-based English teaching approach and contain topics that are related to the daily life of children in China and around the world. Each volume of textbooks contains eight issues for pupils from primary year three (age eight to nine) to primary year six (age eleven to twelve). Each issue contains six units.

### **The Framework of the Textbook Analysis**

As mentioned earlier, textbook study provides insight into the strategies and power dynamic between interest groups involved in knowledge reproduction. Both *NV English* and *PEP English* conveyed large amounts of cultural information via illustrations, while some messages were made apparent by combining texts.

Unlike previous textbooks, both of these EFL textbooks contain separate sections focusing on cultural knowledge. These cultural knowledge sections provide an introduction to both Chinese and foreign cultures, covering topics such as food, costumes, and places of interest. Several scenarios featuring foreign children studying in China occur in both textbooks, which imply a sense of global or multicultural community.

Beside these individual sections, more hidden messages are conveyed by illustrations, and relate to gestures, classroom settings, and the way in which social actors and the interactions between them are portrayed in pictures. Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer<sup>20</sup> noted that pictures or illustrations in children's literature not only make the reading material

attractive but also reflect cultural values. However, the message carried in illustrations has largely been neglected in studies about textbooks, especially in those dealing with younger pupils. My study of “cultural values” therefore covers both texts and illustrations in textbooks. Visual images in particular contain symbolism, which shows how power operates and to what effect.<sup>21</sup>

Culture is often defined as a set of understandings shared by a group of individuals. While values usually entail statements about what is considered to be right and wrong and about what is important and unimportant, cultural values are standards shared by members of groups.<sup>22</sup> In this respect, Ron Scollon and Suzanne Scollon<sup>23</sup> provide a framework of major cultural factors in intercultural communication (see table 1).

**Table 1. Major Cultural Factors in Intercultural Communication**

<p>1. Ideology: history and worldview, which includes:</p> <p>(a) beliefs, values, and religion</p>
<p>2. Face system: social organization, which includes:</p> <p>(a) the concept of the self</p> <p>(b) kinship</p> <p>(c) community (<i>Gemeinschaft</i>) and society (<i>Gesellschaft</i>)</p> <p>(d) ingroup-outgroup relations</p>

Texts and illustrations concerning messages about such cultural factors occur in both *NV English* and *PEP English*. However, in the Chinese cultural context, these messages have further social connotations resulting from a profound twenty-first century commitment to Confucianism. Confucianism emphasizes the importance of education in the moral development of the individual such that the state is governed by moral virtue rather than by the use of coercive laws. In practice, themes in Confucian philosophy matured into the

preoccupation with humanity, ritual, filial piety, relations between juniors and seniors, and loyalty (see table 2). Confucius largely provides the logical historical root of Chinese authorities' policies in modern society. However, moral principles are always changing in step with social development. The country's official ideology has changed significantly and is still doing so, under the influence of the state's development agenda.

**Table 2: Themes in Confucian Philosophy**

Humanity	Refers to Confucius' consideration of an individual's development. Principles such as kindness, consideration, generosity, and forgiveness are emphasized.
Ritual	Refers to the essential role of propriety or politeness in daily life. Traditionally, it is extended to the routines of Chinese people in the normal course of their lives.
Filial piety	This is characterized as the respect and obedience that children should show to their parents. It is also extended to the living, the dead, and remote ancestors.
Relations between juniors and seniors	Refers to the social duties that arise from one's particular situation in relation to others. Each individual is involved in several power relations with different people. For example, relations between pupils and teachers, children and their parents, or between young people and older people. On the one hand, juniors are expected to respect their seniors. On the other hand, seniors are also expected, according to Confucianism, to be kind and concerned about juniors.
Loyalty	Originally, loyalty was the equivalent of filial piety in a wider power relation such as that between the ruler and the ruled, although emphasis was placed more on the obligation of the ruled to the ruler. Also, it is extended

	to one's duties to friends, (nuclear and extended) family, and spouse. In modern China, the emphasis on loyalty is that of the individuals' duties to the nation and the state.
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In my initial analysis of EFL textbooks I drew on Scollon and Scollon's "major cultural factors."<sup>24</sup> The concepts of patriotism, respect, diligence, collectivism, and gender provided a "heuristic device" with which to do in-depth textbook analysis.

Texts and illustrations concerning these cultural factors occur in the *NV English* and *PEP English*. In other words, moral training in EFL textbooks is given via the transmission of "patriotism," "respect," "diligence," and "collectivism."

In order to explore the process by which these cultural values are taught and learned, I interviewed seventeen textbook editors in the PEP press. A series of questions addressed the process of textbook design, the planning of cultural value transmission via textbooks, cooperation between the Chinese publisher and international editors, and illustrations in textbook design.

### **Patriotism**

Both *NV English* and *PEP English* promoted patriotism by designing texts and illustrations that promote national identity and national pride. National identity is addressed in images of the "national flag" and in texts covering topics such as "national day." A sense of national pride is conveyed via characters who highlight the Chinese people's contribution to civilization, such as "the invention of paper in ancient China."<sup>25</sup> In *NV English* book six, the term "Olympic" introduces nations instead of sports. This implies that the "Olympic Games"

offer an opportunity to gain national pride beyond competing in sports. In a way, such a portrayal addresses “nation pride” together with awareness of global competition.

Patriotism is presented as a priority of moral education, which is required to be embedded in all subjects in Chinese basic education. Interview data shows that textbook editors are aware of such requirements. However editors believe that “patriotism” is transmitted via their products implicitly, or at least this is what they intended to do. In interviews, textbook editors also expressed doubt about the necessity of delivering the rather “theoretical” term of “patriotism” to children at primary school age. Indeed, to ensure that materials are appropriate for a given age group, the sense of patriotism was mainly embedded and implied via visual images.

## **Respect**

According to book editors, textbooks are clearly designed to encourage pupils to be respectful. In both *NV English* and *PEP English*, unsurprisingly, respect for seniors (including teachers, parents, and elders) is strongly emphasized in texts and illustrations.

In both volumes, pupils are encouraged to love and express love for their parents. This value is intentionally included in textbooks. One book editor made it very clear that, “in terms of family, we were delivering a message of ‘I love you, you love me, and we are a happy family.’” Editors believe that a loving kinship relation helps children to make sense of the concepts of respect. Ultimately, it contributes to children’s internalization of the social values of respect. Both volumes likewise portray a traditional family structure with two parents and children, while no other type of families (single parent families, for example) are included. Book editors claim that they intend to portray “a nice” scenario of life in the textbooks. Some editors also mentioned that they try to introduce daily life into textbooks, although there was no debate about whether various family structures should be included. It

is evident that the nuclear family structure containing both a mother and a father portrayed in textbooks is the outcome of editors' judgment. It is portrayed unconsciously and guided by what editors understand to be the "appropriate" family structure reflecting social expectations of family and parenthood in China.

Illustrations suggest that relations between teachers and pupils are ambivalent, that pupils are encouraged to respect their teachers as well as to expect teachers to be their friends. The editors' comment about this reflects current expectations in the Chinese education system that educators seek to build equality between teachers and pupils, and to encourage children to be more confident in critical thinking. Traditionally, teachers are honored and treated with a very high level of respect and reverence. However in recent years, such reverence is seen as a hindrance to pupil-centered teaching and learning.

### **Diligence**

Diligence, which is always considered to be one of the most important values in Chinese culture, is encouraged not only in schools, but by all Chinese people. In both volumes, two aspects of diligence are shown, concerning life and professions. Diligence is transmitted via a positive attitude to life and study, in which pupils are encouraged to study and work hard. For example, in *NV English* book seven, pupils are taught "early to bed, early to rise" and to "put away school work before watching TV."<sup>26</sup> In the same volume, a hard-working scientist is presented as a role model.

Interviews show that the promotion of diligence was not a part of the textbook design. As an editor explained, a positive picture of life is portrayed in textbooks, where only well-behaved children with good academic performance are presented. However, the unconscious inclusion of the cultural value of diligence gives a vivid picture of what textbook editors understand to be a "positive lifestyle," which reflects current social expectations in China.

While hard work is considered to be positive, it is more likely for “relaxation and enjoyment” to be left out of the picture.<sup>27</sup> Although editors claim that they did not intend to promote diligence, this cultural value, which “prioritizes work over entertainment,” was evidently reflected in textbooks. For instance, in *NV English* a scientist who works long hours is positively presented as a successful and respectable role model.

### **Collectivism**

Collectivism is mainly interpreted as “group harmony,” which is covered throughout the textbooks, although the scale of the group varies in relation to the school year for which the textbook is designed. Both volumes emphasize a harmonious relationship between family members. For example, phrases such as “Father and mother love son and daughter; brother and sister love each other” appear in *NV English* book two. Meanwhile, children are encouraged to make friends with their peers. In *NV English*, children are also encouraged to be caring and to help their friends. For example, a story shows a scenario in which a group of children goes and visits their friend who is ill. They bring her fruit and presents and offer to help her with her studies.

The concept of groups is later enlarged to include the nation and the world. In both *NV English* and *PEP English*, people from various countries are represented with images of people with black, blonde, or red hair and in modern Western-style clothes. People from China, Japan, Singapore, and white westerners are represented in texts and images.

Unlike the never discussed question about family structure, the portrayal of a “(world) group” in textbooks appears to be more inclusive. Compared to *NV English*, a more inclusive multiracial target culture is set in *PEP English*. In *NV English*, there are no photos of people with dark or black skin. Groups of black people are shown only a few times in the primary year six textbook, in illustrations of school life worldwide. In *PEP English*, a black family is

included in order to represent people from the United States. The portrayal of various ethnic groups in textbooks reflects the editors' understanding of today's multicultural world. It also indicates what target culture they wish to address. Racial diversity in *PEP English* derives partially from the fact that it is a Chinese-Canadian cooperative publication and also reflects the background of its chief editor. The Canadian editor of *PEP English* uses this school textbook to promote social diversity. Although the PEP press initiated the collaboration between the publishers of both *NV English* and *PEP English*, the Canadian editors' proposal to present racial diversity was supported by the editors of *PEP English*. One editor explained this choice as the result of their chief editor's Western academic and working experience, which made him rather "modern." Although it is unclear whether the *NV English* team discussed racial diversity, it is evident that the textbook presents a combined understanding of the traditional and modern world. Such a mixture of traditional and modern viewpoints is similarly expressed in the form of gender roles.

### **Gender Roles**

Overall, a rather stereotyped gender identity is shown in *NV English* and *PEP English*. For example, words like "beautiful" and "pretty" are often used to describe females. When the males and females appear as husband and wife, the male tends to have a job with a higher social status than his wife. This portrays the traditional Chinese notion that the male is the bread winner or head of the family. This viewpoint appears in both volumes.

In both volumes, many scenarios involve conversations between parents and children; 90 percent of these communications involved the mother and the child. If the conversation took place at home, mothers tended to be depicted as the "housekeeper." Mothers wear aprons, casual dresses, and slippers. They feed children and their friends, clean the house, and do laundry and shopping. They may not work outside the house because they can be found in

a “home scenario.” Unlike females, who are presented as housekeepers and nurturers, fathers are presented as the money makers of the family who have a professional or white-collar image. These portrayals imply traditional gender roles found in the family and society, where females are expected to take more responsibility for housework than their partners.

However, some evidence reveals a clash between traditional attitudes toward the politics of male-female interaction and the modern notions of the female’s career and social responsibility. For example, occupations such as that of driver, teacher, farmer, doctor, nurse, or postman are associated with different genders. However, fathers might help mothers with housework if asked to do so. *PEP English* contains an attempt to portray modern gender roles. We see a father struggling to take care of the child when the mother is not at home.

Editors claim that no clear standards regarding gender behavior are applied in textbook designs. However, there have been debates about how gender roles should be presented to children while efforts were made to balance different types of gender behavior in textbooks. One editor claimed that:

I don’t think we consciously emphasized the traditional social gender role in textbooks. It is just “common sense” I suppose. It is like an invisible standard . . . this is not avoidable since it reveals social reality in today’s China. I think it is okay to accept “common sense.” But we also consciously added to textbooks scenarios like “father cooks at home” in order to ensure a balance in terms of gender roles.

It is evident that editors and writers are fully aware of the need for balanced gender roles. However, most of them believe that “common sense” should be prioritized in order to

maintain a similarity between textbooks and children's lives, even if they admit in interviews that textbooks may reflect stereotypical attitudes toward gender.

### **The Practice of “Common Sense”**

The 2001 national curriculum in China, like the previous curriculum, reinforces the importance of “moral education” in schooling.<sup>28</sup> The focus of moral education remained on “patriotism, collectivism and socialist ideals,” alongside other tasks designed to foster the development of pupils' self-esteem, self-reliance, and self-fortification. The results of the textbook analysis reveal that EFL is used to deliver moral education. However, moral themes promoted by the Ministry of Education are not always prioritized in the EFL textbook design. In other words, book editors had considerable influence on the inclusion and interpretation of cultural values in EFL textbooks. Meanwhile, the portrayal of these cultural values reveals the coexistence of traditional and modern views. On the one hand, this reflects the unmistakable influence of cultural globalization on cultural values in modern China. Discourses of gender equality and social inclusion have also gradually emerged in Chinese society. Although we will have to wait a long time before they are accepted by the majority, EFL textbooks show that they have attracted the attention of educators.

The production of national textbooks in China unfolds in stages, proceeding from approval to design, censorship, and publication. Each applicant submits a proposal to the Ministry of Education prior to textbook design. Editors start working on their project once the proposal has been approved by the State Textbooks Examination and Approval Committee (STEAC). Later, the completed design has to be examined and approved by the STEAC in terms of its ideological content, scientific spirit, and adaptability to classroom instruction. During the design process, the national curriculum must be followed as a guideline. At the policy level, the state appears to steer the textbook development process. However, it is not

clear to what extent it exercises leadership, for there is no detailed list of instructions and regulations to guide the practice of textbook design. Textbook editors have considerable leeway to rely on their own judgments. During interviews, editors often used the term “common sense” to defend their decisions regarding the interpretation of cultural values (of patriotism and collectiveness, for example) in textbook design.

Convictions concerning what is common to the social majority, which normally remain unspoken, in fact represent a cultural system. They provide basic rules in societies that are so much a part of people’s lives that they do not have to be expressed. As described by Apple,<sup>29</sup> “these ‘common senses’ are shared assumptions and the product of specific groups of people.” The content of “common sense” varies across cultures and within them, for these shared assumptions are often historically and ideologically “conditioned.” The presentation of local culture in EFL textbooks reflects the editors and writers’ “common sense,” which is shaped by economic, ideological, and social class conditions.

“Common sense” may vary among different social classes. Evidence shows that both *NV English* and *PEP English* are geared toward urban people and middle-classes. For example, middle-class professions (including doctors and teachers) are often referred to in the books as suitable career choices for pupils. Images of domestic settings are frequent alongside urban lifestyles, including modern home furniture and Western-style foods, which are more likely to be seen in urban China rather than in rural areas. However, several editors explained that they strove “to bring a positive picture of daily lives into textbooks and make the textbooks more interesting.” In a way, these assumptions about what constitutes a “positive lifestyle” reflect the editor and authors’ urban middle-class biases.

Editors do not convey clearly how cultural values are transmitted. Some interviewees believe that primary school pupils are too young for them. However, the textbook analysis reveals the presence of both Western and Eastern concepts of cultural values. Indeed, EFL

also conveys moral education in primary education. The lack of detailed guidelines means that “common sense” works as an unspoken rule in the field of textbook design, according to which several cultural values (patriotism, respect, and collectivism, for example) should be included in education.

Editors or writers have a great deal of autonomy in the transmission of messages about cultural value. Although the national curriculum has to be followed in textbook design, “common sense” provided a hidden but dominant guide to cultural and knowledge reproduction via EFL in China. To some extent, textbooks conveyed not only the cultural values of dominant groups, for editors also reproduced their cultural values in national textbooks.

This application of “common sense” in a textbook also affects the way in which a target culture is framed. The 2001 EFL curriculum emphasizes how important it is to “help pupils to be aware of cultural differences between nations in the world, especially differences between Chinese culture and Western culture.” In the “cultural awareness” section, “culture” is defined as “history, geography, custom, lifestyle, literature and arts, code of conduct, social value and so on” in English-speaking countries.<sup>30</sup> Within the detailed descriptions for primary education, many cultural aspects of English-speaking countries are mentioned such as forms of greeting, major forms of entertainment and sports, the most common drink and food, capitals and national flags, symbolic buildings, and major holidays. On the primary education level, culturally related issues focus on cultural products of English-speaking countries, especially developed Western countries, although some major Asian countries or bilingual countries are also mentioned in textbooks. The textbooks reflect a preference for a few developed countries such as the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

Although editors claim that they do not avoid values of a target culture when designing a textbook, the introduction of foreign cultures into Chinese education are subject to official social control. As mentioned earlier, the State Textbooks Examination and Approval Committee works to ensure that the content of textbooks used in Chinese schools are ideologically acceptable. Although these two EFL textbooks were developed following collaboration between China and foreign countries, Chinese editors took the lead in all major decision making. One editor among PEP's foreign partners described their partnership as "project leader (PEP) and proof-reader (international press)."

These textbooks contain evidence of modern values that may be more widely accepted in Western countries. Some values related to gender roles and social inclusion are based on a mixture of traditional and modern attitudes. However modern notions may not automatically be labeled as Western. These examples of an emerging global discourse in the Chinese context testify to cultural homogenization and the flow of ideas across the globe.

The interpretation of world cultures reflected in textbook design contain some cultural stereotypes. As mentioned earlier, the 2001 EFL curriculum contains terms such as "the most important English-speaking country," "the most important sports or entertaining activities in the world," "the most popular drink," and "the main English-speaking country."<sup>31</sup> How we should define what is "the most important" depends on the process of textbook design. In other words, it depends on how textbook editors and writers understand the world and how they interpret the cultures of English-speaking countries. One editor made this very clear when he explained,

the way in which culturally related issues are delivered in a textbook in China depends mainly on how the chief editor understands that culture and what he/she wants to emphasize in the books.

An example of such stereotyping is found in a section about “national sports” in *NV English*. The term “national sports” implies the idea of national pride. In this context, it is arguable what sport can represent each country. In some countries such as the United Kingdom, the existence of such a term is debatable since people may have different favorite sports. “Cricket” is stated as the “national sport” of the UK in *NV English*, but football and rugby are also highly valued by British people. The question “how do you define the most important sports and the most common drink and food?” was raised during the interviews. Most Chinese interviewees’ responses were driven by “common sense” while, in practice, information was based on either their English-speaking partner’s recommendations or their experiences and assumptions. However, following the example of “national sports,” such “common sense” reflects Chinese people’s generalized understanding of world culture. It shows that the curriculum designers and textbook editors or writers interpreted the target culture and made assumptions within a Chinese context, based on Chinese cultural values and “common sense.” A similar portrayal of world culture is also found in the section entitled “Children all over the world celebrate Children’s Day.” Although Children’s Day is very important for Chinese children, it is in fact not a universal festival for children from many other countries. Here, the editors or writers applied their “common sense,” which arose in a Chinese context, and made assumptions about foreign cultures.

The results of the textbook analysis indicate a strong emphasis on delivering Moral Education through EFL. A range of cultural values, including patriotism, respect, diligence and collectivism are identified in the research. Indeed the design of national textbooks is still led by the national curriculum. However, there is a lack of detailed guidance on textbook design, in particular for the delivery of culture related knowledge. The findings of textbook analysis and interviews suggest that there was a large space left to textbook editors and writers to interpret the policy through designing textbooks to be used in classrooms.

As discussed earlier, the results of textbook analysis cultural values embedded in textbooks reflects an urban and middle-class lifestyle as well as a mixture of traditional and modern views. It is not always a rational decision when it comes to what cultural values should be transmitted through textbooks. Instead, as revealed by the interview findings, it is often a case of the practice of the “common sense” of textbook editors and writers. It is possible to argue that such an unconsciously transmitted sense of common are values are the representations of cultural understandings shared by editors and writers. In other words, refer to the nature of knowledge discussed at the beginning of the article, in the case of EFL textbooks in China, to a large extent it is the textbook editors and writers who held the power to produce or reproduce their knowledge and managed to make it “official” through school education.

## Notes

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  11. Adamson and Morris, "The English Curriculum in the People's Republic of China," 4.
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  13. See People's Education Press, *Quan Ri Zhi Gao Ji Zhong Xue Ying Yu Jiao Xue Da Gang*, 1; and Adamson, *China's English*, 173.
  14. People's Education Press, *Quan Ri Zhi Gao Ji Zhong Xue Ying Yu Jiao Xue Da Gang*, 1–2.
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<sup>30</sup>. People's Education Press, *Pu Tong Gao Zhong Ying Yu Ke Cheng Biao Zhun*, 22.

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