





Chenming Lin

Faculty of Social Sciences and Liberal Arts,
UCSI University, Malaysia
Department of Foreign Languages,
Tongji Zhejiang College, China

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5363-001X>

Sabariah Md Rashid

Faculty of Social Sciences and Liberal Arts,
UCSI University, Malaysia

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3297-0306>

How is the National Image Represented? A Multimodal Cognitive Perspective of EFL Textbooks in China

Abstract

Currently, very few studies have discussed representations of a national image in textbooks of English as a foreign language (EFL) from the multimodal critical cognitive perspective. To address this issue, this study, based on conceptual blending theory, critical discourse analysis, and multimodality, aims to qualitatively examine the co-instantiation of texts, images, and tasks that represent the national image in two Chinese EFL textbook series, People's Education Press (PEP) and Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP). The study explores the text-image-task semiotic relationship in constructing social-cultural meanings in textbooks. Content analysis of the selected textbooks suggests that the indexical relationship between the text, image, and task matters in the representation of the national image. The findings reveal how the text-image-task co-instantiation helps EFL learners develop cultural awareness of national image cognitively. The study makes comparisons between PEP and FLTRP and suggests that teachers' pedagogical strategies, textbook design, and learners' learning approach be improved in the development of cultural awareness.

Keywords: representation of national image, English as a foreign language textbook, conceptual blending theory, multimodality

Technological development facilitates the birth of several types of teaching materials, among which textbooks have increasingly received attention from scholars in China (Wang, 2000). That is because the textbook, for teachers, is viewed as the default teaching material. As for language learners, it is perceived as a primary source of language input and practice. Although the convenience of cultural communication in textbooks brings about different pedagogical philosophies, a consensus is reached in language education, according to which language learners should have good English communicative competence and excellent multicultural and multimodal sociability (Atkinson, 1999; Hinkel, 1999; Kramsch, 1998). According to *The Curriculum Standard of Senior English for Chinese Students in 2017*, the construction and development of learners' cultural awareness of the national image should also be highlighted, and aimed at shaping their correct cultural values and cultivating their sense of national identity. Nonetheless, we are puzzled about how national cultural awareness can be implemented in tasks and exercises that are offered in the textbooks (Kurtz, 2010; Tomlinson, 2012). Traditionally, national culture was presented in the textbooks with one or two pictures due to less emphasis on the diversity within that culture. Therefore, a monolithic view of national culture in the textbook was evoked by focusing on certain information without structural exploration, which leaves learners with an impression of disorganization and impeded them from forming cultural awareness of the national image through visual associations. Present-day EFL textbooks employ multimodal resources inclusive of both verbal and visual semiotic modes (Chen, 2010). The cognitive formation of a national image is encouraged through a multimodal, dynamic, hybrid, and emergent understanding of language and culture (Baker, 2012) and results in politically and culturally conscious citizens (Kramsch, 2013; Kumaravadivelu, 2008).

The national image symbolizes national power and represents the overall strength of a nation because it is comprised of different semiotics that underscore the importance of signs and symbols as basic components in human communication and expression. These signs and symbols include culture, history, technology, military, and so forth. The term national image appeared in the work of Kenneth Boulding (1956) and was understood from the social-psychological perspective during the Cold War. Boulding's definition of image as a combination of the cognitive, affective, and evaluative structure of the behavioral unit is further extended to the role of national image. Therefore, national image plays a role in shaping the perception of other agents in the international system (Boulding, 1959). In this regard, research on the national image, economic advancement, and political success is increasingly available in different fields, such as business, tourism, and public media (Dolea et al., 2021; Gilboa, 2008; Hall, 1999; Zhang et al., 2020). However, to date, only a few studies have included the national image in the educational setting (e.g., Goshylyk & Artysh, 2020; Sinaga et al., 2020).

With such a gap in mind, this study aims to examine learning materials available in popular Chinese textbooks for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) at senior high schools. The focus is on how national images are represented multimodally, conceptually, and critically in the textbook through various images, texts, and tasks. “National image” belongs to a kind of cultural awareness that is complicated and largely influenced by diverse factors like people, history, climate, and so forth (Risager, 2007). Learners, who concentrate on studies of national culture, are interested in various cultural elements in the sense of linguistic diversity and explore how individuals and communities construct, share, and navigate the meaning of national identity within cultural contexts in their minds. Psychologically, these elements and their relationships come into play when people use language, and these actions construct cultural mental spaces (Fauconnier & Turner, 2008). In textbooks, a variety of input sources inclusive of dialogs, tasks, pictures, and exercises are offered to help learners construct cultural awareness of the national image through language learning in more meaningful contexts (Limberg, 2016). Against the backdrop of previous studies on how to multimodally construct social meanings (Antović, 2021; Athanasopoulos & Antović, 2018; Serafini & Reid, 2019), this study critically and interpretively examines EFL resources through a multimodal critical-cognitive approach. This approach is applied to two respective cases of two textbook series, more specifically, People’s Education Press (PEP) and Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP). Analysis and discussion of selected texts, tasks, and images presented in the textbooks attempt to answer the research question: How does the coordination of texts, images, and tasks as a major focus in Chinese EFL textbooks represent the national image?

Literature Review

The National Image

The term *national image* refers to the influence of the total cognitive, emotional, and evaluative structure of the nation’s behavioral unit on the international system that consists of a group of interacting behavior units called “nations” or “countries” (Boulding, 1956, 1959). Regarding the interpretations, elements, and functions of the national image, Sun (2002) expressed the view that the national image, which is not necessarily equivalent to its actual situation and is inherently constructed, represents the public perception and assessment of a state, involving its politics, economy, society, geography and more. According to Hu (2011), individual knowledge of the national image

is derived from learning, personal experiences, book narratives, social media, and the social relations of a person. Besides, the national image is perceived by the state itself and other agents in this international system, and it is the result of information input and output with a clear structure (Boulding, 1959). It is also considered as a state's intangible asset or soft power (Wu, 2012).

From the perspective of constructivism, the national image is comprehensively reflected upon and criticized by researchers, to illustrate its social nature and to emphasise the influence it has on learners. Methodologically and theoretically, the national image is mainly understood through qualitative and quantitative content analysis to identify the persistent patterns of frames or agendas of media journalism that play a vital role in shaping and influencing the national image, both domestically and internationally (e.g., Leung & Huang, 2007; Wu, 2006). Therefore, Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), which selectively focuses on emphasizing or de-emphasizing specific elements in shaping the national image, and agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009), which explores the impact of setting agendas on the public perception of international affairs, are universally used in studies related to the national image. Apart from the area of communication, there are studies of the national image in the field of linguistics. For instance, a corpus-based critical discourse analysis of China's image that is represented in the US social media, through statistical measures of collocations, aims at identifying—in great measure—the recurrent transitive patterns against the backdrop of China's economy (Tang, 2021). Another perspective of the national image construction adopts a diachronic and holistic approach, utilizing critical discourse analysis to analyze business news headlines from mainstream media in both China and ASEAN countries (Yuan et al., 2022).

To sum up, the aforementioned studies are insightful and have strong explanatory power in the construction of the national image. However, the national image is a form of cultural awareness, and its development is a cognitive process. From a macro-perspective, the construction of the national image seems to be more ideological and stereotypical. As per the synthesized aforementioned literature review, it is found that many studies on the national image rely on social media interpretations, but less attention is paid to the educational discourse. Therefore, the construction of the national image, along with the urgency of the international system and the publication of relevant policies, becomes a pedagogical focus. It is a kind of awareness that inspires teachers and learners to negotiate and better appreciate their own culture dynamically and progressively (Kramsch, 2013), so a statistical and holistic method to study the national image is not suitable. Thus, in the present study, a critical cognitive perspective for the analysis of the national image constructions in EFL textbooks in China is employed, because these textbooks are rich in cultural elements, and increasingly emphasize fostering a sense of national identity among learners.

National Image Studies on Textbooks

Textbooks are regarded as representing the basis of the curriculum for foreign language learners and teachers, and in specific cultural contexts, learning culture is closely associated with textbooks (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Macgilchrist, 2017). The national images that are represented in textbooks are studied throughout the world, as countries in development are confronted with various complex ideological issues that have a great influence on the construction of the national image. Much research is solely focused on textbooks of literature, history, geography, or civil education (Gao & Zhang, 2021; Gu, 2015; Pingel, 2008).

The research track of the national image in textbooks started in the 1950s and continues to the present. It experiences three phases, including various theoretical innovations (1950s–1980s), the systematic construction of theories (1990s–2000s), and the integration of theories and practices (2000s–present). In the first phase, the initial concept of national image, coined by Boulding (1959), was expanded to include the discussion of the intergenerational transmission mechanism of the national image in the textbooks (Kelman & Bailyn, 1962). Along with industrial advancement, studies turned to the relationship between society and social power. In the second phase, textbooks were viewed as a carrier of the national image and were systematically embodied in philosophical views and in the cultural discourse of the society of the time (Coman, 1996; Garcia, 1993; Kizilyürek, 1999; Ohliger, 1999). The third phase witnesses the maturity of research on the national image in textbooks regarding the integration of theories and practices, such as national image representations. It is logically constructed and has a far-reaching influence on learners' and teachers' cultural awareness.

Studies of the national image in textbooks have shed some light on the importance of national image constructions and made language scholars aware of the need to emphasize the relationship between the national image and EFL contexts. That is because the national image helps people identify with other groups who have the same nationality and shared interests and helps better communicate the social spirits and civilization in EFL to other parts of the world (Heidari et al., 2022). As per the aforementioned research, textbooks are the primary input source of language and culture. National image in EFL textbooks, however, is less talked about. A search of “national image” and “EFL textbooks” as keywords in searching papers on the related topics in the ERIC database, the statistics from the year 2018 to 2022, suggest that 487 peer-reviewed articles were found.

Previous EFL studies of the national image in textbooks, theoretically and methodologically, were more focused on the critical analysis of the EFL discourse, and some interviews, utilizing a qualitative or a quantitative method to identify the persistent national patterns of ideology and power relations

(Setyono & Widodo, 2019; Ulum & Köksal, 2021; Xiang & Yenika-agbaw, 2019; Xiong & Peng, 2020). For instance, Ulum and Köksal's study (2021) collected qualitative and quantitative data via interviews and questionnaires to unveil teachers' and learners' understanding of the national image contained in EFL textbooks. On a different stance, Setyono and Widodo (2019) examined different themes of national image in EFL textbooks based on critical social semiotic analysis in examining the image-text semiotic relations and their hidden cultural meanings in EFL textbooks (Xiong & Peng, 2020). Xiang and Yenika-Agbaw (2019) employed Kachru and Nelson's model of English spread in critically analyzing the national image of cultural variables in EFL textbooks. Such analyses in the studies offer a macro-perspective of the cultural awareness that is represented in EFL textbooks and inform the analytical focus of the present study.

Previous studies have highlighted the global conceptualization of the national image but tended to largely ignore the representation of cultural awareness and its underlying reasons dynamically and progressively. Besides, in comparison with traditional EFL textbooks, the modern ones are abundant in colorful images, which makes them more personalized and interactive. A multimodal perspective of the national image in the EFL textbooks (Elmiana, 2019) enlightens the present study, since, in Elmiana's research, functions and appropriateness of different modes are illustrated in EFL textbooks from the part of learners' cognitive associations, for pedagogical purposes. Concerning research methods, the quantitative analysis only takes unambiguous features of the texts, while the qualitative method pays more attention to implicit contents and contexts (Syed, 2010). In the current study, the qualitative approach is adopted to identify salient patterns of national image in EFL textbooks. That is because the emergence of potential social meaning regarding cultural awareness is largely reliant on contextualisation cues and needs interpretation in some cases.

Therefore, the EFL textbooks that the current research studied were chosen from PEP and FLTRP, which are the two largest publishers for EFL learners in China. Importantly, both include plentiful images, well-structured texts, and meaningful tasks, following the guidelines set by the Ministry of Education of China. The research seeks out how the national image is represented in the two selected EFL textbook series and suggests differences between them.

Theoretical Framework

The Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT), also referred to as Conceptual Integration Theory (Fauconnier & Turner, 2008), is widely used in different research fields such as music, language and literature, film studies, and

many more, for exploring the construction of meaning (e.g., Gordejuela, 2019; McAlister, 2006; Spitzer, 2018). CBT, which is multidirectional, differs from the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) (Lakoff, G. & Johnson) and the Perceptual Meaning Analysis (Geeraerts et al., 2005), and is more advanced than the two unidirectional theories. In CBT, the effectiveness of uncovering emergent meanings lies in the integration of components from different, yet structurally relevant and blended, mental spaces. This integration results in the creation of new spaces with robust explanatory capabilities, enhancing the comprehension of existing concepts or the emergence of novel ones (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). In the current study, the selected EFL textbooks are designed with plentiful culture-related images, texts, and tasks to represent the national image, which can be understood and interpreted by EFL readers. In the process of their reading and interpreting these images, texts, and tasks, readers relate various cultural elements available to the national image in their mental spaces, during which different conceptual meanings emerge and blend, contributing to the readers' overall conceptualization of the national image. Thus, given the influence of EFL textbooks on shaping learners' cultural awareness of the national image, CBT is deemed a relevant approach in investigating discursive representations within EFL textbooks.

Furthermore, CBT is seen as being subjectively goal-driven. The analytical procedures within CBT are always viewed as a motivated explanation, which has been answered by mountainous empirical qualitative research from different perspectives, primarily drawing from the book *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). The current study aims to investigate the readers' mental process related to the ongoing construction of the national image. In the process, the underlying power dynamics, ideologies, and social constructions that contribute to the formation of the national image are uncovered. Therefore, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can be a valuable tool to uncover the values, beliefs, and norms that are promoted or challenged, and shed light on the ideological underpinnings of the national image in the context of social meaning constructions within CBT (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997).

The compatibility of CBT and CDA is largely attributed to the relationship between language, conceptualization, and cognitive factors. This relationship can be mirrored by CDA which describes the relationship between text and discourse (Hart & Lukes, 2007). To be more specific, CDA reveals how the co-representations of texts, images, and tasks contribute to the construction of the national image and shape readers' perceptions by uncovering the symbolic meanings attributed to these elements and how they contribute to the construction of social meanings. However, social meaning constructions should not be merely confined to the words themselves, since multimodal cognitions of what we focus on are of great importance. Jewitt (2009), for instance, argued

that the “multimodal turn” ushers a new era in the understanding of how new technologies have largely broadened the avenues through which meanings are constructed. A mode, therefore, serves as a means for creating meaning, encompassing elements like images, dialogues, colors, or written text (Smith, 2021). That is because the semiotic modes are regarded as carriers of cultural meanings as well as signs indexing cultural significance (Weninger & Kiss, 2013). In the context of the multimodal environment, which benefits from technological advancements, another significant undertaking is set in motion by multimodality. This concept involves the utilization of multiple means, such as speech, images, and color, in the process of meaning-making (Bateman et al., 2018; Norris, 2019). In EFL textbooks, abundant different modes create a constellation and they are instantiated together to achieve curriculum goals and hidden ideologies (Chen, 2010).

The national image in EFL textbooks is regarded as a type of cultural awareness that is constructed and reconstructed through the interaction of textbooks and learners (Derakhshan, 2021). Interactional and structural micro-processes of language choice are always coupled with social ideologies and power relations, from the view of sociolinguistics (Hart & Lukes, 2007). Thus, the context of well-structured images, texts, and tasks in EFL textbooks carries societal values and reinforces specific ideologies, which largely realizes the development of learners’ being culturally aware of the construction of the national image.

Taking the above-mentioned concerns into account, this present study, based on CBT and CDA, focuses on how the co-instantiation of texts, tasks, and images can conceptually lead to the learners’ formation of the semiosis process in the construction of the national image. Besides, this study also offers practical insights that can benefit teachers in refining their pedagogical strategies, assist language textbook designers in comprehending the potential cognitive processes involved in constructing social meanings, and aid language learners in improving their reading skills.

Methodology

The overarching aim of the study, situated within the interpretivism paradigm, is to investigate how the national image is represented conceptually and multimodally in the selected EFL textbooks by the content analysis of the text, image, and task.

Textbook Sampling

Data sources are two EFL textbook series for senior high school learners in China, one from PEP and the other from FLTRP. The two EFL textbook series were officially approved by China's Teaching Material Committee in 2019 before they could be distributed in the market. Each of the book series comprises seven textbooks, Compulsory Textbooks 1–3 and Selective Textbooks 1–4. Hereafter, compulsory Textbooks 1 to 3 are numbered as Book 1 to Book 3 and the selective Textbooks, as Book 4 to Book 7 in sequence.

The reasons for choosing the two series of textbooks were based on several criteria. First, the two textbook series are consistent with the pedagogical philosophy that is centered on the cultivation of learners' cultural awareness of China's patriots and the development of their multicultural sociability in *The Curriculum Standard of Senior English for Chinese Students in 2017*. Second, these textbook series are the primary input sources of language and culture for senior high school learners in China. This means that the EFL textbooks from PEP and FLTRP play an influential role in shaping learners' language skills and awareness and are worthy of investigation. For the PEP textbook series, each book has five units covering sections such as Reading, Listening, Speaking, Writing, Structure, Project, Video Time, and Workbook. In contrast, for the FLTRP textbook series, each book has six units covering activities such as Starting, Understanding Ideas, Using Language, Developing Ideas, and Presenting Ideas. Similarly, each unit in both textbook series has distinctive themes and contains various types of activities. Finally, the two coursebook series provide audio-visual materials that serve as supplementary resources for practicing listening and viewing skills on their official websites.

Data Selection for Analysis

The purposeful sampling technique was utilised for selecting specific sample data for analysis. It was based on the frequency of images occurring in the book units that are relevant to the national image and on the number of their indexicality, a linguistic and semiotic concept that refers to the way signs or expressions derive meaning by pointing to or indexing specific contextual information (Bochmann, 2023), as calculated and shown in Table 1 and Table 2. Based on the information displayed in these two tables, the unit with the maximal degree of text-image-task co-instantiation and indexicality was chosen from each of the series. All these images in units-themed national images were initially scrutinised and identified by the researcher. The identified images were later examined by two experienced researchers who specialise in linguistics and multimodality to verify whether the selected images conform to the text-task-image co-instantiation and indicate indexicality.

Table 1
Details on Images and Indexicality in Units Depicting National Image in PEP

Number	Theme	Unit topic	No. of images	No. of image's indexicality	Source
1	Nature	Natural Disaster	22	6	Book 1 Unit 4
2	Culture	Cultural Heritage	19	6	Book 2 Unit 1
3	People	Morals and Virtues	8	3	Book 3 Unit 2
4	Technology	Space Exploration	10	4	Book 3 Unit 4
5	People	People of Achievement	11	6	Book 4 Unit 1
6	People	Science and Scientist	16	1	Book 5 Unit 1
7	Life	Sharing	9	2	Book 4 Unit 4

Table 2
Details on Images and Indexicality in Units Related to the National Image in FLTRP

Number	Theme	Unit topic	No. of images	No. of image's indexicality	Source
1	People	Making a Difference	16	2	Book 3 Unit 2
2	Sport	Faster, Higher and Stronger	22	4	Book 4 Unit 3
3	People	Meeting the Muse	23	5	Book 4 Unit 4
4	People	A Life's Work	15	5	Book 6 Unit 2
5	History	War and Peace	20	5	Book 6 Unit 3
6	Culture	The World Meets China	21	4	Book 7 Unit 3

Research Findings

The findings of the data analysis are presented and organised according to the selected data identified as *Selection* followed by a number, for instance, 1. This paper presents a detailed analysis of only two selected data samples which comprise texts and images extracted from each of the two aforementioned book series. Due to copyright issues related to multiple designers and authors of the textbooks, Figures 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, and 12 in the paper can be accessed through the following link: <https://figshare.com/s/c750ce34d7a1e95323e4>.

Selection I

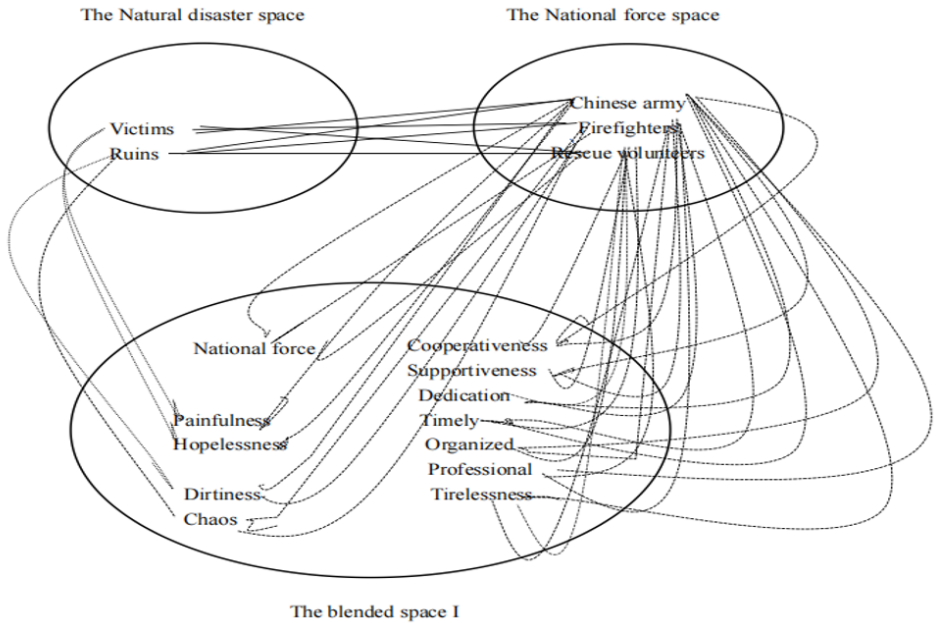
Section I was extracted from PEP's Book 1, Unit 4, Natural Disasters (pp. 47–58). In this unit, the theme of the national image is emphasised through several activities, which include the introduction page, and Listening and Speaking, Reading, and Thinking and Discovering Useful Structures chapters. Meanwhile, the indexical relationship between the text and task in this unit is depicted in six images. Most importantly, the text-task-image co-instantiation facilitates learners' cognitive process of various modes and their associated cultural meanings in the representation of the national image of China.

As shown in Figure 1 (<https://figshare.com/s/c750ce34d7a1e95323e4>), the title Natural Disaster, which is the focused topic of this unit, is closely related to issues including destructions, deaths, victims, and hazards caused by different disasters, which evokes the natural disaster space. Apart from the title, the image in Figure 1 consists of the “ruin space,” the “victim space,” and the “national power space.” This is related to the Chinese army which is one of the major components of the national pillar, and on occasions that Chinese people suffer from disasters, the Chinese army always honors its role in defending the people. In this part, the Chinese army evokes a few emotion-related conceptual elements including dedicated, united, and cooperative. The “ruins,” in this context, evoke conceptual elements of dirt, chaos, and aridity, because these elements are related to various mental spaces associated with the concept of dirt. The “victim” evokes conceptual elements like pain, injury, and death. Emphatically, the “ruin space” and the “victim space” can be integrated into the “natural disaster space” to form a blended environment that will include them all. This is due to their Cause-Effect relation. As suggested by the following task, “What’s going on in this photo?”, a Cause-Effect relation emerges between the “victim space” and the “national force space” as well as a vital relation emerges by “Time” that connects the “national force space” with the “natural disaster space.” In more detail, and according to the following, the victim who was injured in the natural disaster was saved by the Chinese army, and the events of the natural disaster occurring and the Chinese army appearing are temporarily situated. Therefore, Time has a vital role in connecting two events across input spaces.

Three disaster-related causes are provided in Figure 2 (<https://figshare.com/s/c750ce34d7a1e95323e4>) and are accompanied by an image of the Chinese army and firefighters depicted as moving post-disaster ruins. Prompted by the tasks, reading about the disasters and preparing a short news report, the Cause-Effect and Time relation is enhanced, based on information in Figure 1. That is because the hint given by the task requires the target learner to figure out the relationship between the two events. More importantly, the national force space is enriched by other members, such as Chinese firefighters, who are national

contributors, along with the addition of other conceptual elements, including their timely organisation and specialisation. Additionally, in Figure 3 (<https://figshare.com/s/c750ce34d7a1e95323e4>), as the task asks learners to look at the text's title and illustration, guess what the text is about, and check whether their assumption is correct, the rescue volunteers in this image attract learners' attention and the text's title tells learners how much time the rescue volunteers spend in helping those trapped in the disaster. Consequently, conceptual elements related to perseverance and assistance are evoked in learners' mental spaces. In their mental spaces, perseverance and assistance are conceptually related to rescue volunteers who are always steadfast and cooperative in helping people in a disaster without considering their cost. The national force space is enriched accordingly. In addition, with the task requesting to "read and check whether the learner is right," and based on the previous conceptual information of rescue volunteers' "perseverance" and "assistance," the text further confirms the Time and Cause-Effect relation between the natural disaster space and the national force space. Based on Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3, an emergent blended space is identified as illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4
A Simplified Network Diagram of the National Force and Natural Disaster Blend



Three images are provided in Figure 5 (<https://figshare.com/s/c750ce-34d7a1e95323e4>). The first image provides a proximal lens of a medical worker feeding a baby who survived an earthquake. The second image shows the Chinese army putting up tents, and the third shows a firefighter professionally guiding a dog to a safe place. The proximal perspective of the three aforementioned images triggers the intended effects of making learners empathetic toward these situations and, thus, largely enhances learners' awareness of the national image which involves Chinese soldiers, volunteers, and firefighters who help those in need without hesitation. More importantly, as prompted by the task of "taking turns to ask each other about the pictures and making sentences as per given instruction," the three images evoke a Part-Whole relation with the blended space I. This is because the three images depict three classical roles that are representative of hundreds and thousands of people doing the same job, and bringing hope and stability to the whole nation, which constitutes embodiments of what was achieved by the national forces. A Part-Whole mapping across the mental space that is constructed by the three images in Figure 5, namely the worker-army-firefighter space, and the blended space begins the selective projection of conceptual elements structured previously into the final blend where the representation of the national image comes into being, as shown in Figure 6.

The above analysis offers an explicit explanation of the cognitive aspect that is influenced by information obtained from images, text, and tasks. Essentially, the representation of the national image involves the strategic comprehension that affects the formation process of conceptual elements and mental spaces. The conceptual elements that need to be clarified in this context are not only internal processes but also highly dynamic societal processes of positioning (Li, 2017). The context of natural disasters in this EFL textbook vividly represents the national image of the Chinese national force, including medical workers, firefighters, and the Chinese army bringing hope to the victims of natural disasters with dedication, cooperation, professionalism, and organization, which is reflected in their respective responsibilities and functions to comprehensively safeguard the interests of the Chinese.

Figure 6

A Simplified Network Diagram of the Representation of the National Image

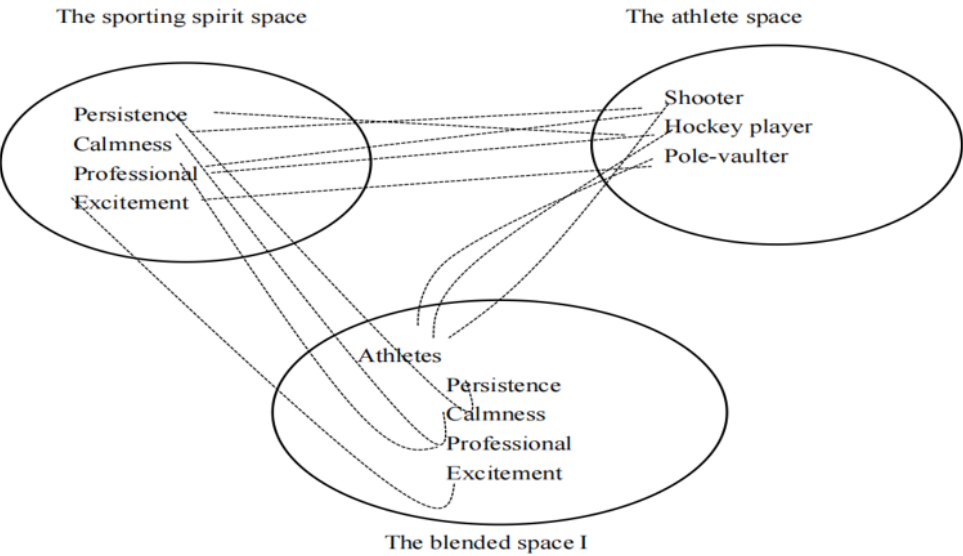


Selection II

Selection II was extracted from FLTRP’s Book 4, Unit 3, Faster, Higher, Stronger (pp. 25–36). Activities that consist of Starting and Developing Ideas are used to emphasise the theme of the national image. The topic Faster, Higher, Stronger displayed at the beginning of this unit can simultaneously activate two mental spaces: the athlete space and the sporting spirit space. That is because the topic, which most Chinese people are familiar with, comes from the slogan used in the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008, which facilitates the activation of learners’ mental spaces. In Figure 7 (<https://figshare.com/s/c750ce34d7a1e95323e4>), there are three images. The former two display athletes’ professionalism and the latter depicts the athlete’s excitement from winning the game. Additionally, prompted by the task comprising questions of “What do you know about these sports people?,” “What can you learn from them?,” “Are there any other sportspeople who inspire you?,” “Who are they” and “Why do they inspire you?,” the outer-space relation “Change” is formed between the athlete space and the sporting spirit space in learners’ minds. This occurs

because the initial sight of athletes in the arena triggers the learners’ conceptual associations with professionalism and beauty that are radiated from their confidence and physical fitness. In line with the clues provided by the task and the topic, our internal knowledge of sporting spirit, such as qualities like persistence, composure, and enthusiasm, gradually comes into play. As a result, the relationship between the external and internal elements can be condensed to create a blended space, as depicted in Figure 8.

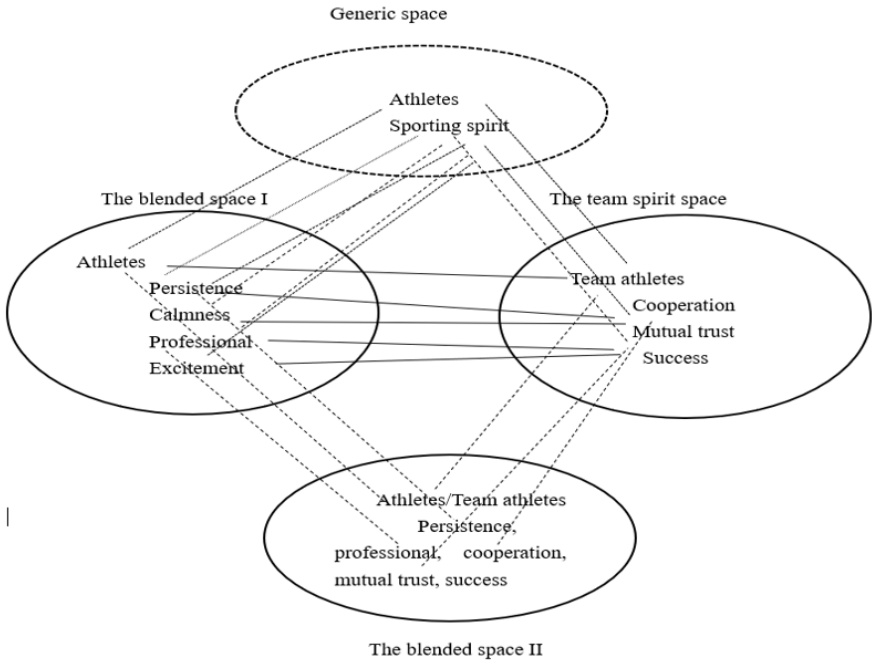
Figure 8
A Simplified Network Diagram of the Sporting Spirit and the Athlete Blend



In Figure 9 (<https://figshare.com/s/c750ce34d7a1e95323e4>), the image of the Chinese women’s volleyball team engaged in competition leaves a strong impression on learners in that it evokes conceptual elements associated with a strong team spirit, fighting spirit, and professionalism. Along with the given task, the questions “What are the key differences between team sports and individual sports?,” “Can you think of any famous sports teams?” and “Why are they so well-known?” remind learners to keep in mind the spirit of cooperation and mutual trust. More importantly, the hint, “team sports and individual sports,” activates the two mental spaces, namely the “blended space I” and the “team spirit space.” The two input spaces begin cross-space mapping within a mirror integration network, as seen in Figure 10.

Figure 10

A Mirror Network Diagram of the Athlete Spirit and the Team Spirit Blend

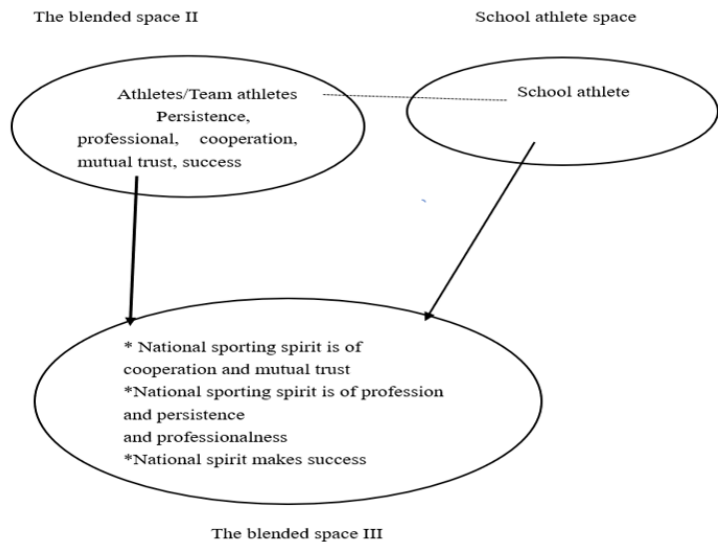


Additionally, within the text shown in Figure 9, the phrases “strong team spirit also contributed greatly to their success” and “teamwork is the key to China’s victory” elicit the desired effects, fostering a sense of patriotism and further enriching the sporting spirit space as depicted in Figure 7. This is because team spirit, involving elements like cooperation and trust, plays a significant role in this context. In Figure 11 (<https://figshare.com/s/c750ce-34d7a1e95323e4>), the image with the headline of the spirit of the Chinese women’s volleyball team and the group task strengthens learners’ cultural awareness of the national image.

A Part-Whole cross-space mapping between the mental space that is activated by the task, the text, and the image in Figure 12 (<https://figshare.com/s/c750ce34d7a1e95323e4>), and the previous “blended space II,” which are projected to the “blended space III,” can be seen in Figure 13. Here, a conceptual representation is formed that suggests if one strives to complete the race, success will be achieved, and cheers from others will follow, as mentioned in the text. Additionally, inferred information from the task and the image implies that qualities like diligence, perseverance, fatigue, and endurance are intertwined with success in the sporting arena. Within the blend, success and the sporting

spirit are the desired outcomes, and relentless hard work and endeavor are the prerequisites for the attainment of national resurgence.

Figure 13
A Simplified Network Diagram of the Representation of the National Image



Cultural elements such as the Chinese red color, underpin the representation of the national image, visually. The image of the Chinese female volleyball team can be regarded as a kind of ideological regulation, which attempts to evoke learners’ sense of patriotism. Moreover, inference information evoked by different tasks and texts in this unit facilitates the readers’ understanding of how the text, image, and task co-construct the national image.

Discussion and Pedagogical Implications

Comparisons between the two selected samples from the PEP and FLTRP are drawn based on the methodology, and the research findings. The EFL textbooks from the two series are focused on various themes with different techniques and activities that facilitate learners’ activation of the mental spaces in constructing the national image by the co-instantiation of the text, image, and task.

Based on the above analysis, the two series of representations of the national image are similar in the activation of learners' internal knowledge and their interactively creating and applying knowledge in their real-life situations (Burr, 2021). The tasks in the two series are not solely responsible for the learners' basic language skills, but also for being the link between the development of their cultural awareness and the context of different semiotic resources; both of them are, at the same time, afforded by images and texts. Texts, being intricate linguistic practices, are examined with a partial focus on the contextual elements provided by images. This approach aids in grasping the contextualization of cultural, social-political, and ideological processes (Burr, 2021).

Meanwhile, significant variations between the EFL textbook series are evident in terms of the types of activities, the frequency of images, and the indexical qualities of those images. In terms of activities, PEP largely emphasizes the development of learners' basic skills, because each one of its units is made up of listening, speaking, reading, writing, pronunciation, and structure, while FLTRP focuses on developing learner's cultural awareness. This is expressed through such activities as understanding ideas, using language, developing ideas, and presenting ideas. The frequency of images in the two series also differs, which can be seen in Table 1. It is worth noting that when it comes to image indexicalities, PEP incorporates a greater number of images than FLTRP does to represent the national image.

In this study, the proposed approach to cognitive resources in EFL textbooks is attributed to the premise that texts, images, and tasks are consciously designed ahead. However, the well-designed contents are not conducive to learners' imagination, because conceptual integration as a human's general capability of innovatively cognitive processing is subject to diverse cognitive elements in their socio-cognitive environment (Stroud, 1992). Besides, as Turner (1994) put it, a multimodal semiotic perspective allows us to theoretically divorce ideas from the representation to see how our view of the world is constructed. The critical analysis in the section on results and discussions, thus, is scaffolded by textual evidence that is approachable and addressable from EFL textbooks, which is assumed to inform representations of the national image.

What can also be achieved is research implications for teachers' pedagogical strategies. Advisably, EFL teachers are encouraged to receive continuous professional growth courses that are designed for them to better familiarize themselves with the recent conceptualization of cultural matters (Derakhshan, 2021). Furthermore, their pedagogical strategies should align with the learners' abilities, and the examples mentioned above can serve as valuable references for enhancing learners' cultural awareness of the national image. That is to say, the interlaces between images, tasks, and texts that are related to Chinese culture should be highlighted to help learners form a clear and correct mental image of China.

Implications for EFL textbooks' designs and EFL learners are also worth mentioning. What can be underscored for EFL textbooks' designs is the co-instantiation of images, texts, and tasks. Some images and tasks that lack cultural significance and serve primarily as decorative elements should be removed. In designing EFL textbooks, one can consider four key directions: authenticity, resourcefulness, connectivism, and a focus on text genres (as outlined by Burr, 2021). Unaltered examples respect learners' identities, experiences, and opinions. Strategically, pedagogical objectives should be pursued through diverse methods that are interconnected on both micro and macro learning levels. Different themes can linguistically and semiotically engage learners' perspectives. For EFL learners, as they strive to imaginatively grasp the cultural purpose, they can initially examine the images in textbooks and, guided by task prompts, establish connections between the images and the texts. This process should nurture their ability to critically interpret cultural practices.

Conclusion

This study has applied a multimodal critical cognitive analysis to examine how national images are represented multimodally in EFL textbooks. The findings of the study indicate that learning materials from both PEP and FLTPR co-instantiate text, task, and image that facilitate learners' activation of mental spaces to represent the national image. Traditional EFL textbooks tend to highlight linguistic resources, but the data analysis of the selected samples suggests that in social meaning constructions, the role of the text-task-image co-instantiations and their mutual indexicality is more important compared to the presence of words alone. As Turner (1994) originally puts it, "When we deal with images, it is especially apparent that we are not only dealing with the object or the concept they represent, but we are also dealing with how they are represented."

There are some limitations to this study. The findings are descriptive due to the worldview of the research, which employed CBT and CDA to examine learning materials in EFL textbooks. Future studies should undertake an analysis of discourse combined with technological assistance. In addition, due to space and time constraints, only two sections from PEP and FLTRP have been examined with the contribution of two researchers and the author in the data collection process. In terms of the characteristics of cultural awareness related to the national image, prospective studies should involve actual classroom interactions. Such an approach has the potential to significantly enhance learners' cultural competence and linguistic skills. Furthermore, using the

insights gained from this study, theoretically coherent pedagogical models may be formulated to support the development of learners' cultural awareness in the EFL classroom.

References

- Antović, M. (2021). Multilevel grounded semantics across cognitive modalities: Music, vision, poetry. *Language and Literature*, 30(2), 147–173. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963947021999182>
- Athanasopoulos, G., & Antović, M. (2018). Conceptual integration of sound and image: A model of perceptual modalities. *Musicae Scientiae*, 22(1), 72–87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1029864917713244>
- Atkinson, D. (1999). TESOL and Culture. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(4), 625–654 <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587880>
- Bateman, J., Wildfeuer, J., & Hiippala, T. (2018). Multimodality. Foundations, research and analysis. A problem-oriented introduction. *Romanistisches Jahrbuch*, 69(1), 227–231. <https://doi.org/10.1515/roja-2018-0009>
- Burr, S. (2021). *Linguistic Landscape Signs in E-textbooks: Teaching Language as a Compass for Exploring Multimodal Texts, Multilingualism, and Digital Resources*, 1, 937–952. <https://doi.org/10.22364/htqe.2021.74>
- Bochmann, A. (2023). The sociology and practice of translation: interaction, indexicality, and power. *Qualitative Research*, 23(6), 1781–1799.
- Boulding, K. E. (1956). *The Image: Knowledge in Life and Society*. University of Michigan Press.
- Boulding, K. E. (1959). National images and international systems. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 3(2), 120–131.
- Chen, Y. (2010). Exploring dialogic engagement with readers in multimodal EFL textbooks in China. *Visual Communication*, 9(4), 485–506. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357210382186>
- Coman, P. (1996). Reading about the enemy: School textbook representation of Germany's role in the war with Britain during the period from April 1940 to May 1941. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 17(3), 327–340. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142569960170306>
- Cortazzi, M., & Jin, L. (1996). Cultures of learning: Language classrooms in China. *Society and the Language Classroom*, 169–206.
- Derakhshan, A. (2021). 'Should textbook images be merely decorative?': Cultural representations in the Iranian EFL national textbook from the semiotic approach perspective. *Language Teaching Research*, 28(1), 79–113. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168821992264>
- Dolea, A., Ingenhoff, D., & Beju, A. (2021). Country images and identities in times of populism: Swiss media discourses on the 'stop mass immigration' initiative. *International Communication Gazette*, 83(4), 301–325. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048520913462>
- Elmiana, D. S. (2019). Pedagogical representation of visual images in EFL textbooks: A multimodal perspective. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, 27(4), 613–628. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2019.1569550>
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58.
- Fauconnier, G., & Turner, M. (2008). Conceptual integration networks. *Cognitive Linguistics: Basic Readings*, 22, 303–372. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0364-0213\(99\)80038-x](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0364-0213(99)80038-x)

- Fauconnier, G., Turner, M. (2002). *The way we think: Conceptual blending and the mind's hidden complexities*. Basic Books.
- Flowerdew, J. (1997). Reproduction, resistance and joint-production of language power: A Hong Kong case study. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 27(3), 315–337. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0378-2166\(96\)00036-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0378-2166(96)00036-7)
- Gao, D., & Zhang, Y. (2021). Organizing and reconstructing children's experiences: Compiling national civic textbooks in China. *ECNU Review of Education*, 5(4), 683–701. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2096531121990510>
- Garcia, J. (1993). The changing image of ethnic groups in Textbooks. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 75(1), 29–35.
- Geeraerts, D., Dirven, R., Taylor, J. R., Langacker, R. W., & Hampe, B. (Eds.). (2005). *From perception to meaning: Image schemas in cognitive linguistics*. Mouton de Gruyter.
- Gilboa, E. (2008). Searching for a theory of public diplomacy. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), 55–77. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207312142>
- Gordejuela, A. (2019). Understanding retrospection: Blended joint attention and the multi-modal construction of film flashbacks. *Language and Literature*, 28(2), 115–132. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963947018815420>
- Goshylyk, V., & Artysh, O. (2020). Teaching national symbols through films in the EFL classroom. *European Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3, 84–87. <https://doi.org/10.29013/EJHSS-20-3-84-87>
- Gu, X. (2015). Evidentiality, subjectivity and ideology in the Japanese history textbook. *Discourse and Society*, 26(1), 29–51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926514543225>
- Hall, D. (1999). Destination branding, niche marketing and national image projection in central and Eastern Europe. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 5(3), 227–237. <https://doi.org/10.1177/135676679900500303>
- Hart, C., & Lukes, D. (2007). Cognitive linguistics in critical discourse analysis. In *Cognitive Linguistics in Critical Discourse Analysis: Application and Theory*. https://www.academia.edu/2950646/Cognitive_Linguistics_and_Critical_Discourse_Analysis
- Heidari, H., Malmir, A., & Zarei, A. A. (2022). The contribution of various dimensions of L2 identity to L1 national identity: A case of the Iranian EFL context. *Two Quarterly Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning University of Tabriz*, 14(29), 27–43.
- Hinkel, E. (Ed.). (1999). *Culture in second language teaching and learning*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hu, X. (2011). Guojia xingxiang [Nation Image]. Xinhua chubanshe.
- Jewitt, C. (2009). *The Routledge handbook of multimodal analysis*. Routledge.
- Kelman, H. C., & Bailyn, L. (1962). Effects of cross-cultural experience on national images: a study of Scandinavian students in America. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 6(4), 319–334.
- Kizilyürek, N. (1999). *National memory and turkish-cypriot textbooks*. Internationale Schulbuchforschung, (4).
- Kramsch, C. J. (1998). *Language and culture*. Oxford University Press.
- Kramsch, C. J. (2013). Culture in foreign language teaching. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 1, 57–78.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2008). *Cultural globalization and language education*. Yale University Press.
- Kurtz, J. (2010). Zum Umgang mit dem Lehrwerk im Englischunterricht [On textbook usage in English lessons]. In E. Fuchs, J. Kahlert, & U. Sandfuchs (Eds.), *Schulbuch Konkret: Kontext–Produktion–Unterricht* [Textbook concrete: Context–production–teaching] (pp. 149–163). Klinkhardt.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago University Press.

- Leung, C. C. M., & Huang, Y. (2007). The paradox of journalistic representation of the other: The case of SARS coverage on China and Vietnam by Western-led English-language media in five countries. *Journalism*, 8(6), 675–697. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884907083118>
- Li, S. (2017). Identity constructions in bilingual advertising: A critical-cognitive approach. *Applied Linguistics*, 38(6), 775–799. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amv062>
- Limberg, H. (2016). Teaching how to apologize: EFL textbooks and pragmatic input. *Language Teaching Research*, 20(6), 700–718. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168815590695>
- Macgilchrist, F. (2017). Textbooks. In J. Flowerdew & J. E. Richardson (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of critical discourse studies* (pp. 525–539). Routledge.
- McAlister, S. (2006). “The explosive devices of memory”: Trauma and the construction of identity in narrative. *Language and Literature*, 15(1), 91–106. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963947006060557>
- McCombs, M. E., & Reynolds, A. (2009). How the news shapes our civic agenda. In: J. Bryant & M. B. Oliver (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research*, 3rd ed. (pp. 1–16). Routledge.
- Norris, S. (2019). *Systematically working with multimodal data: Research methods in multimodal discourse analysis*. John Wiley.
- Pingel, F. (2008). Can truth be negotiated? History textbook revision as a means to reconciliation. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 617(1), 181–198. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207313087>
- Risager, K. (2007). *Language and culture pedagogy: From a national to a transnational paradigm*. Multilingual Matters.
- Serafini, F., & Reid, S. F. (2019). Multimodal content analysis: expanding analytical approaches to content analysis. *Visual Communication*, 22(4), 623–649. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357219864133>
- Setyono, B., & Widodo, H. P. (2019). The representation of multicultural values in the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture-Endorsed EFL Textbook: a critical discourse analysis. *Intercultural Education*, 30(4), 383–397. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2019.1548102>
- Sinaga, T., Putrawan, G. E., & Nurdiana, N. (2020). Cultural Values in a High School EFL Textbook in the Indonesian Context. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 8(5), 1944–1952.
- Spitzer, M. (2018). Conceptual blending and musical emotion. *Musicae Scientiae*, 22(1), 24–37. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1029864917714302>
- Stroud, C. (1992). The problem of intention and meaning in code-switching. *Text*, 12(1), 127–155. <https://doi.org/10.1515/text.1.1992.12.1.127>
- Sun, Y. (2002). National image’s connotations and functions. *International Forum* (vol. 3, pp.14–21). Beijing Foreign Studies University.
- Syed, N. A. (2010). The effect of Beijing 2008 on China’s Image in the United States: A Study of US Media and Polls. *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 27(16–18), 2863–2892. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2010.508277>
- Tang, L. (2021). Transitive representations of China’s image in the US mainstream newspapers: A corpus-based critical discourse analysis. *Journalism*, 22(3), 804–820. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918801116>
- Tomlinson, B. (2012). Materials development for language learning and teaching. *Language Teaching*, 45(2), 143–179. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444811000528>
- Turner, G. (1994). Film languages. In D. Graddol & O. Boyd-Barret (Eds.), *Media texts, authors and readers: A reader* (pp. 119–135). Multilingual Matters in association with The Open University.
- Ulum, Ö. G., & Köksal, D. (2021). A critical inquiry on the ideological and hegemonic practices in EFL textbooks. *Multicultural Learning and Teaching*, 16(1), 45–61.

- Weninger, C., & Kiss, T. (2013). Culture in English as a foreign language (EFL) textbooks: A semiotic approach. *TESOL Quarterly*, 47(4), 694–716. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.87>
- Wang, Y. (2000). A Comparative Study of the Primary and Secondary Textbook System in China Mainland, Hongkong, Macao, and Taiwan. *Curriculum, Teaching Material and Method*, 9, 49–51.
- Wu, M. (2006). Framing AIDS in China: A comparative analysis of US and Chinese wire news coverage of HIV/AIDS in China. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 16(3), 251–272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01292980600857781>
- Wu, Y. (2012). A research review of China's national image and its positioning. *China Economist*, 5, 9–10.
- Xiang, R., & Yenika-Agbaw, V. (2019). EFL textbooks, culture and power: A critical content analysis of EFL textbooks for ethnic Mongols in China. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 42(4), 327–341. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2019.1692024>
- Xiong, T., & Peng, Y. (2020). Representing culture in Chinese as a second language textbook: A critical social semiotic approach. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 34(2), 163–182. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2020.1797079>
- Yuan, Z., Leng, T., & Wang, H. (2022). Understanding National Identity Construction in China-ASEAN Business Discourse. *SAGE Open*, 12(1), 215824402110693. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211069385>
- Zhang, J., Adhikari, D., Fahmy, S., & Kang, S. (2020). Exploring the impacts of national image, service quality, and perceived value on international tourist behaviors: A Nepali case. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 26(4), 473–488. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356766720942559>

Acknowledgments

This study was funded by Tongji Zhejiang College under the Research on Education and Teaching Reform Program: The Exploration of EFL Courses in China: Multiple Semiotic Practice and the Construction of Chinese Culture (XNJG21028). Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Tongji Zhejiang College. We would like to thank KetengEdit (www.ketengedit.com) for its linguistic assistance during the preparation of this manuscript. The authors acknowledge that Figures 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, and 12 are adapted from copyrighted materials published by the People's Education Press (PEP) and the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP). Due to copyright restrictions, which prohibit the direct reproduction or distribution of these materials without explicit permission, these figures are not included in this paper. However, they can be accessed via the following link: <https://figshare.com/s/c750ce34d7a1e95323e4>.