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A cross-national analysis of cultural representations in English textbooks used in China and Germany

Xiao Zhang[1] ⃝ **· Xiaoli Su[2]**

Abstract

Culture learning is complicated in teaching English as an international language (EIL), given the global contexts in which English is being used for various purposes. This study aims to examine cultural representations in four series of high school English language textbooks distributed in China and Germany. It categorized cultures into four cultural types and four cultural elements within each type of culture in order to question the breadth and depth of cultural representations. The findings indicate that China's English textbooks seem to balance among different cultures, but they still present factual knowledge and static information. The underlying value orientations are therefore underestimated. Germany's English textbooks encompass the majority of contents about the target culture and put the emphasis on students' multicultural perspectives, communicative competence and intercultural skills. Thus, target cultures dominate cultural contents and source cultures are rare in Germany's textbooks. Lastly, the findings are discussed and some recommendations for textbook writers and English teachers are suggested.

Keywords EIL · English textbooks · Cultural representations · China · Germany

Introduction

Against the background of globalization and international mobility, English has become the primary language between people who interact with each other in the world. The number of non-native English speakers, which has already surpassed the number of English native speakers, has influenced the status of English in the world today (McKay 2003c). The current status of English as an international language (EIL) therefore challenges the hegemony of native speaker norms in English

✉ Xiao Zhang
zhangxiao201310@126.com

1 Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Munich, Germany

2 Sichuan International Studies University, Chongqing, China

language teaching (ELT) practices (Modiano 2001). The notion of EIL recognizes the different norms of English use around the world (Richards and Schmidt 2002). Further, the EIL teaching paradigm propels the re-evaluation of traditional English language teaching (ELT): how to design English textbooks and incorporate inter-cultural insights into teaching materials? Previous solutions to this question are suffering from critical identification. For example, Nguyen (2011) criticizes the traditional focus on English-speaking countries in English teaching materials. She points out that the foremost pedagogical objective of ELT should train English learners to communicate in international settings effectively. Therefore, ELT materials should not only have the target language culture but also incorporate multiple international cultures, because it will help learners to negotiate their understanding of the interlocutors' values and that of themselves to establish solidarity (Nguyen 2011). Hence, native speaker norms as the sole standard for evaluation can no longer reflect the English linguistic landscape for today (Jenkins 2014; Seidlhofer 2011).

ELT textbooks, which function as a significant aid for English learners, largely influence their cognition and affective attitudes toward themselves, other people and society. ELT textbooks need to address different voices and cultural perspectives to enable English learners to figure out different cultural values (Shin et al. 2011). From the EIL perspective, textbooks should integrate a diversity of English learners' racial and cultural backgrounds and empower them to identify various voices. However, current ELT textbooks do not pay sufficient attention to incorporate different cultural values in multiple cultures (Yuen 2011).

The purpose of this study is to investigate ELT textbooks distributed in China and Germany regarding cultural representations. This study starts with conceptualizing the EIL and cultural issues to which it gives rise. Then, previous studies of cultural representations in ELT textbooks are examined from various aspects. Furthermore, it illustrates the background of this study and then discusses the results regarding types of culture and cultural elements of each cultural type in selected textbooks. Lastly, it comes up with some recommendations for English textbook writers and teachers during the EIL implementation.

Literature review

English as an international language

English is now used as an international language among people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds worldwide. That is to say, the new paradigm termed EIL, accepts English as 'a lingua franca' and as 'a medium of intercultural communication' (Seidlhofer 2003). Given the international use of English in multi-faceted social contexts, EIL rejects the superiority and authority of native speakers and associated cultures, and further identifies the diversity of cultures and respects English learners' cultures. It allows learners to be familiar with the variety of contexts where English is spoken and to communicate effectively in international contexts (Shin et al. 2011) instead of following native speaker norms.

Kachru ([1985](#)) introduced the concept of three concentric circles—the *Inner Circle*, the *Outer Circle*, and the *Expanding Circle* to categorize how English is used by individuals of different lingua-cultural backgrounds. English used in Inner Circle countries, such as the UK, the USA, is defined as varieties by native speakers. The Outer Circle consists of countries such as India, Nigeria, and the Philippines, where English is used as an official language in the historical context of colonization. The Expanding Circle refers to settings where English is a foreign language and includes countries like China, Japan and Korea. Kachru's model recognizes many English varieties, and one variety is not favored over another (Kirkpatrick [2007](#)). Furthermore, this model accounts for the cultural diversity that has accompanied greater linguistic diversity (Kachru [1990](#)).

EIL also challenges the ownership of English by a growing awareness that English is learned for different purposes. Many non-native people use English without thinking about the cultures of Inner Circle countries but only thinking about the need to communicate (Clayton [2006](#)). Hence, a growing number of English learning purposes undermine the traditional connection between cultures of Inner Circle countries and ELT. Moreover, an increasing number of bilingual users and the denationalization of English warrant a new pedagogy which should provide the basis for cross-cultural understanding in the globe (McKay [2003a](#)).

Therefore, English learners should not be strictly required to espouse the culture settings of Inner Circle countries when negotiating meanings with other users of English (McKay [2003b](#)). In response to the rapid global development, being aware of English learners' own cultural rules and how the rules are different from those of the interlocutor becomes essential to the success in intercultural communication settings (Samovar et al. [2017](#)). Furthermore, Alptekin ([2002](#)) argues that effective L2 learning does not necessarily include learning the entire target culture, and some specific target cultural characteristics might even influence meaningful communication between non-native speakers of English.

Nevertheless, conventional ELT is still confined within a monolingual and static English teaching paradigm (McKay [2002](#); Matsuda [2012](#); McKay and Brown [2016](#); Smith [1976](#); Sharifian [2009](#)). For example, ELT textbooks do not present diverse cultural contents but focus predominately on American and British culture (Shin et al. [2011](#)). Similarly, ELT practices tend to adopt native speaker norms (e.g., American or British English) as the primary criterion and require English learners to speak like a native speaker (Crystal [2003](#)).

Language and culture in EIL

Over the past decades, ELT underlined the importance of knowing the culture of English-speaking countries and learning the language itself. Nevertheless, a growing body of literature realizes learners' needs in a student-centered context that details the importance of their native cultures. From the EIL perspective, understanding learners' own cultures are paramount, and overemphasizing target cultures tend to peripheralize their own cultures (Alptekin [2002](#)). The research has shown that the use of learners' own prior experiences is encouraged to facilitate effective L2

learning (Alptekin 2002). Similarly, McKay (2003b) demonstrates that the cultural context of American or British English differs significantly from the cultural context of non-native English speakers, which might add to the difficulty of mastering English. It has been argued that English learners do not have to depend on the cultural schema of native speakers to negotiate meanings and to communicate with other English users (McKay 2003b). Furthermore, Alptekin (2002) points out the necessity of decontextualizing English, and one approach is to design instructional materials that incorporate familiar and indigenous features of learners' own culture because learners can engage with discourse and accordingly enhance the L2 learning experience.

More to the point, the sociocultural theory supports the social context of an understanding of culture and language in intercultural communication through EIL. Learners actively participate in the language acquisition process through communication with peers and teachers in different contexts. Learners' English variants and local contexts play a crucial role and should not be relegated to marginal status (Shin et al. 2011). Hence, an understanding of culture and language is, while not denying the so-called Inner Circle countries, considered as "emergent and dynamic and the boundaries between one language and culture and another are less clearly delineated" (Baker 2011). English, as the global lingua franca, can be utilized and adapted to the needs of the individual users and contexts in which intercultural communication takes place (Baker 2011).

A more critical perspective on the relationship between culture and language with successful intercultural communication through EIL is detailed accounts of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) through the work of Michael Byram (e.g., Byram 1997; Byram and Fleming 1998). A fundamental notion of ICC is 'critical cultural awareness' which is defined as 'an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries' (Byram 1997). Crucial to this conceptualization of culture and language through EIL is the ability to compare and mediate between different cultural norms in intercultural communication. Being an alternative to the native speaker model, Byram proposes the 'intercultural speaker' which allows for the negotiated communication, without the ideal model to which the other has to conform.

Cultural contents in ELT textbooks

English is not the exclusive property of the Inner Circle countries anymore. English as an international language involves non-native speakers of English for different communication purposes. From the EIL perspective, Mckay (2003a) argues that the cultural content of teaching EIL materials should not be limited to native English-speaking cultures and further demonstrates that EIL pedagogy should be informed by local expectations regarding the role of the teacher and the learner. Textbook writers should consider the variability and help learners utilize their familiar cultural experiences to facilitate their identification with varieties of English. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) argued for a reflective stance when dealing with cultural contents and cultural process. They

categorized culture into three types: source cultures, target cultures, and international target cultures. Source cultures refer to learners' own cultures. The purpose of integrating source cultures is to allow learners to be inherently familiar with contents and increase comprehensible input (Hardy 2004). Target cultures are where the target language is used as the first language. Drawing on target cultures into learning materials helps learners develop their attitude toward language learning and enhance motivations (McKay 2002). International target cultures aim at cultures where English is not the first or second language but is used as an international language. The rationale for classifying international target cultures is that English is frequently used in global communication settings by non-native English speakers. McKay (2004) reveals that approaching information from international cultures offers learners opportunities to develop cross-cultural sociolinguistic competence by helping them acquire notions about how to communicate appropriately with people in global settings.

Previously, the exploration of cultural contents in English textbooks has been conducted from the EIL perspectives. Many researchers agree that most current English textbooks still focus on Western cultures (e.g., Alptekin 1993; Renner 1993). For example, Ren (2001) compared teaching topics in English textbooks for Grade 5 in China and Germany, and questioned the breadth and depth of cultural representations and further offered insights by focusing on cultural varieties. Syrbe and Rose (2018) examined three English textbook series used in high schools in Germany. They found out the over-reliance of UK models of English and static depictions of cultures in selected textbooks.

Additionally, Hasan and Raddatz (2008) compared the cognitive, affective and procedural aspects of English elementary textbooks in Syria and Germany. Results showed that Syrian English materials achieved the balance of three aspects, whereas Germany's English textbooks emphasized affective and procedural elements of the UK. García (2005) examined ELT textbooks' cultural contents and pointed out cultural biases in cultural representations of Spanish ELT textbooks that favored target language cultural values and norms. In Asia, Shin et al. (2011) compared aspects of culture and levels of cultural presentation in seven series of 25 English textbooks in several Asian countries. They noticed the domination of Inner Circle cultural context in all examined textbooks. Yuen (2011) investigated the cultural contents of two English textbooks in Hong Kong secondary schools and concluded that the cultures of English-speaking countries were dominant and African cultures were under-represented. Although many studies have identified cultural contents in ELT textbooks in different regions, Cortazzi and Jin (1999) maintained that additional research with a more reflective attitude toward cultural content and methodology is needed in various countries to meet the goal of improving cultural awareness from the EIL perspective.

Background to the study

English in China

After China carried out the policy of reform and opening up to the outside world in the late 1970s, more importance has been given to English teaching and

learning (China Daily 2010). Since 2001, English should be learned from the age of 8 or 9 onwards in the national education system. The key significance of English in the educational system can be manifested in the National University Entrance Qualifying Exam (or *gaokao*). For some years, China has been cited as a significant English learning society, where the numbers of English learners have been more than 200 million people (Bolton 2003).

At the same time, China's universities established a growing number of English-taught programs to attract international students, showing increased signs of internalization. These English-as-the-medium programs cover a variety of majors including business, economics and foreign languages study. It appears that English has spread in the educational domain. Thus, Chinese students are exposed to a variety of Englishes when they communicate with students from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Besides, an increasing number of Chinese students have been learning English to further education in other countries. Coupled with this is the fact that Chinese students gain more exposure to different Englishes used by a variety of people. Additionally, more Chinese companies now have cooperation or team up with foreign companies. This left Chinese people in urgent need to communicate in international settings. Therefore, English plays a significant role in China, namely as a language for intercultural communication in various areas.

English in Germany

English is used as a contact language in Europe between speakers whose native language is not English. It serves as a communication tool in education, working places and the public sphere of Europeans. In Germany, English also plays a significant role in many domains. Germans most often use English skills for traveling and getting information from the Internet. According to the European Commission (2012) report, 40% of Germans indicated that they are most likely to use English on the Internet. In higher education, Germany was only second to The Netherlands in the number of English-as-the-medium masters offered in 2013. Therefore, an increasing number of international students come to Germany to engage in English-taught programs and complete full degrees abroad.

English is by far the most common foreign language in Germany. 56% of Germans speak English on the proficient level, allowing them to hold a conversation (European Commission 2012). Besides, English is frequently used for international communication in many companies, as not all of the workers are German-speaking. Currently, more German students might seek work outside of Germany in other European job markets, and this further increases their exposure to communication in English with non-native English speakers (Syrbe and Rose 2018). Therefore, German students might use English in various diverse contexts in their work and private life. English serves as a lingua franca, enabling them to communicate with people who do not share their native language (Syrbe and Rose 2018).

Context of the study

China and Germany are typical Expanding Circle countries where English is taught and learnt as a foreign language in Kachru's three concentric circles. Both of them have a close connection to their home cultures, and L1 is mostly used as the teaching language in ELT process (Hou 2017). It indicates a relatively similar English teaching context between China and Germany. Furthermore, the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) criterion exert impacts on English education policies of China and Germany (Hou 2017) and cultural learning as one of English learning outcomes is integrated into both countries' ELT curricula.

Additionally, teaching EIL is highly encouraged in high schools of China and Germany. In China, the central government takes responsibility for setting the educational curriculum. The ELT curriculum indicates that English has been one of the necessary skills for people around the world. Mastering English as a lingua franca is access to foreign cultures, technology and international communication. Furthermore, learning English helps promote China's international relations with other countries.

In Germany, each state is free to set their curriculum and textbook materials, although some small states follow the innovations of the resource-rich states (Syrbe and Rose 2018). This study sought to choose a state that would be the most representative of ELT approaches in Germany. Due to the economic prosperity and hybrid cultures of Bavaria, it was deemed as the appropriate choice. In the Bavaria's curriculum [*Lehrplan*], it states that in light of international communication and mobility, English serves as the lingua franca of the world and plays a central role in everyday situations as well as in many professional and academic contexts (Staatsinstitut für Schulqualität und Bildungsforschung München 2016). Therefore, ELT should aim to develop students' language mediation, communicative and intercultural skills, and enrich their repertoire of linguistic resources.

The aforementioned illustrates the comparability of this study. Despite the growth of research interest in ELT textbooks from the EIL perspective, too little attention has been paid to Germany's English textbooks. Further, although recent attempts have been made to examine cultural representations of English textbooks from a cross-cultural perspective (e.g., Ren 2001; Shin et al. 2011), such cross-cultural studies of textbooks are underexplored. This study aims to investigate the extent to which EIL is reflected in English textbooks of China and Germany by addressing the following questions:

(1) How do English textbooks used in China and Germany differ in types of culture?
(2) How are cultural elements represented in English textbooks in China and Germany in terms of persons, products, practices and perspectives within each type of culture?

Methodology

Sampling

For the study purpose to be achieved, the selection of textbooks was based on suggestions collected from English teachers of China's high schools and English teachers of German Gymnasium.[1] Based on research questions, four series of textbooks were selected consisting of two series of two textbooks used in the State of Bavaria, Germany and two series of four books used in Beijing, China. For comparability, all four strings were chosen as typical examples of texts used in Grade 10, which is the start of the advanced levels in foreign language learning. According to Syrbe and Rose (2018), EIL would be able to take a central role at this level, after the mechanics of the English language had been taught. Besides, elementary students' immature cognitive level and minimal knowledge of English only allows the introduction of surface cultural conceptions and knowledge-oriented contents in elementary textbooks. As English proficiency increases, deep cultural concepts with intercultural communication features can be introduced to students in the intermediate or higher-intermediate level (Shin et al. 2011; Tajeddin and Pakzadian 2020). Therefore, the incorporation of Outer and Expanding Circle related cultures mostly happens in high school textbook series. The sample of textbooks are listed in Table 1.

Data analysis framework and procedure

To answer the first research question, this study employed Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) framework, which divided culture into three types, namely source cultures, target cultures and international target cultures. Besides, Naser and Hussein (2016) added one category to apply to the cultural content which does not belong to any of three divisions. Therefore, this study added Naser and Hussein type division, that is, culture neutral in the fourth sense to the framework of types of cultures.

The framework used for the second research question was proposed by Yuen (2011) to classify cultural elements in English textbooks. Yuen distinguished four sorts of cultures in *four Ps*, namely products, practices, perspectives and persons. Products refer to tangible cultural objects, such as food, movies, TV programs, merchandise, print, travel destinations. Practices relate to daily life, society, sports, school life and customs. Perspectives include cultural materials that convey perceptions, values, myths, beliefs and worldviews which guide people's behavior in cultural practices. Persons are about famous individuals (fictitious or unknown), figures and characters. One exception is that fictional characters in stories or movies are viewed as products, and therefore, they are excluded from this type (Yuen 2011).

In this study, data were collected from descriptive texts, dialog scripts and quotes in textbooks. All of the relevant contents were used as the baseline data, and a content

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[1] The German Gymnasium is an academic secondary school that prepares pupils for the university education.

Table 1 Textbooks sampling

Title	Authors	Publisher	Publish date	No. of items
Ying Yu (Compulsory)	Qiang Wang, Ruizhen Cao, Zehang Chen, Qi Wang, Xinzhong Chen, Xin Ma, Huiyun Cheng, Xiaofang Qian and Zhenzhu Li	Pearson Education Asia Limited and Beijing Normal University Press (Group) Co., Ltd	2019	2
English (Compulsory)	Daoyi Liu, Wangquan Zheng, Xin Wu, Xianchen Zhang, Sarah H. Miller, Nils-Olov Fors, Patrick Wallace, Ping Sheng, Xiangyu Gu, Li Zhuang, Bingfang Ge, Liping Gui	People's Education Press	2019	2
Green Line Transition	Matthias Bode, Peter Bruck, Louise Carleton-Gertsch, Marion Horner, Niamh Humphreys, Nilgül Karabulut, Annette Kroschewski, Michael Rogge, Thomas Tepe	Ernst Klett Verlag GmbH	2018	1
English G-Band 6	John Eastwood, Laurence Harger, Barbara Derkow Disselbeck, Allen J. Woppert	Cornelsen Verlag	2012	1
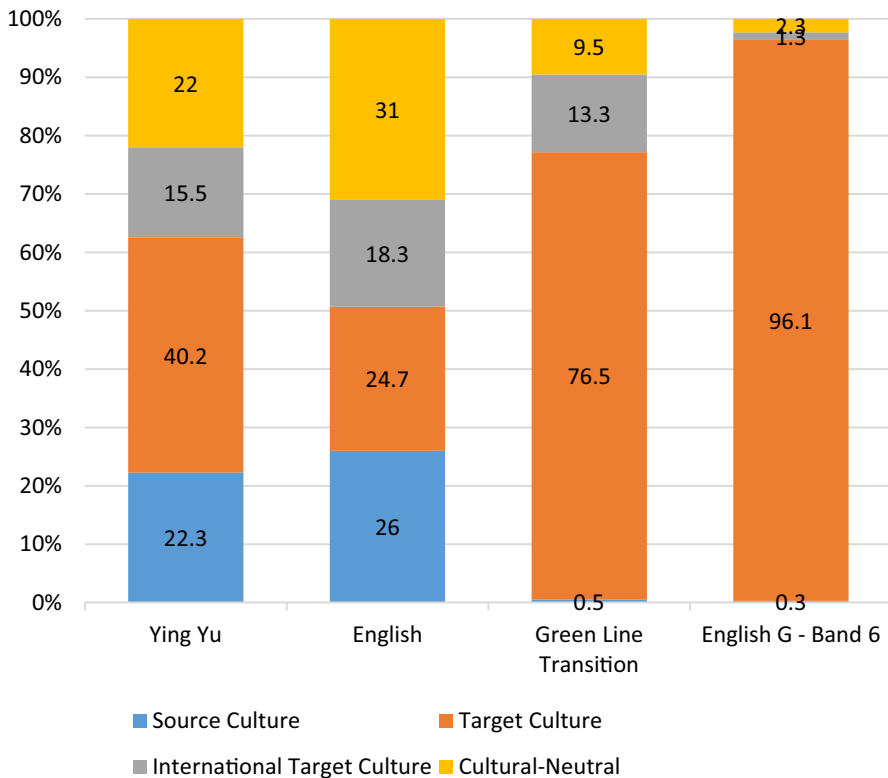
Fig. 1 Types of culture analyzed in selected textbooks

analysis was conducted to transform data into numerical forms according to categories (Neuendorf 2017). In most cases, each paragraph was counted as one recording unit; while in English literary work, recording units consisted of meaningful sections that were split based on the complete dialog among characters. Two researchers participated in the analytic procedure: coding cultural contents, developing coding schemes and classifying contents into cultural categories. Analysis procedures were the following: the first coder initiated the content overview, coding cultural contents and developed coding schemes, and then the second coder went through textbooks again and marked coding schemes which were not agreed upon. After several discussions, the final intra-coder agreement was addressed to maintain the consistency and therefore, the analysis reliability was improved.

Findings

Research question 1: types of culture

This section addresses the first research question in details. Figure 1 displays that target culture dominated the culture type in *Ying Yu*, *Green Line Transition* and *English G-Band 6*, whereas *Ying Yu* and *English* series paid more attention to source cultures than *Green Line Transition* and *English G-Band 6* did. *Green Line Transition* and *English G-Band 6* covered more target cultural contents than other textbook series. Target cultural contents covered various topics in *English G-Band 6* textbooks such as education systems in the UK and the USA, anti-racism, immigrants and entertainment industry. Due to the overwhelming distribution of target culture, few contents touched upon source culture ($f = 0.3\%$), international target culture ($f = 1.3\%$) and cultural-neutral contents ($f = 2.3\%$) in *English G-Band 6*.

Similarly, *Green Line Transition* included more than half of target cultural contents ($f = 76.51\%$) such as sports, minorities in the US and migration to the UK. Besides, this series presented contents about international target cultures such as Guatemala and Sri Lanka. It tapped upon more cultural-neutral contents than *English G-Band 6* did. Under this category, *Green Line Transition* displayed diverse topics which facilitated the English language learning with a global perspective. For example, Unit 4 *think globally, act locally* comprised four short articles which centered around topics: *global village*, *global issues*, *our ecological footprint* and *what is fair trade*, all of which were global issues. The analysis shows, therefore, that even though target cultural information is taking the lead, there are some attempts to globalize and localize the reading texts.

Ying Yu and *English* seemed to achieve balance among different cultural types. According to the analysis, even though target culture dominated cultural contents, *Ying Yu* covered 22.3% source cultures, drawing upon Chinese contents such as the Shenzhou V manned spaceship and the Chinese spring festival. To achieve the balance between source and other cultural types, *Ying Yu* consisted of several texts in the same unit and at least one text was about source culture. These texts help students with their communication skills and promote intercultural competence by comparing their own and other cultures. By comparison, students get insights into their own cultures as well as other cultures. Besides, *Ying Yu* covered multiple content categories of the international target culture, such as Anne Frank and her diary (Germany/Holland), Roald Amundsen (Norway) and Karate (Japan). These contents promoted learners' abilities to communicate cultural phenomena in different contexts using English.

Compared with other series, *English* was the only series that appeared to deprioritize target cultural contents. It indicated the most culture neutral contents and tapped upon many common grounds among cultures. There were some examples such as the freshman challenge, pet shelter, wild animal protection and how the Internet changed humans' lives. These neutral cultural topics presented cultural information which repeatedly appeared in every culture. According to authors of

English series (see Table 1, 4.1), these topics were designed to promote learners' intercultural understanding, intercultural communication and to build up the awareness of a community of shared future for humankind. Thus, analysis results of *Ying Yu* and *English* series tended to incorporate students' familiar source cultural resources into English language classrooms.

Even though target cultural contents in *English G-Band 6* were the most dominant, it had been challenging the native speaker norms by presenting English varieties around the world. On the first page, a map called *English-speaking countries* provided explicit reference to English as an international language. In the same vein, the first lesson in Unit 1 was *global English*, which described the use of English around the world. Such a reading section attempts to help students move beyond the hegemony of native speaker norms and know all the different cultural contexts of communication they may encounter.

Surprisingly, *English G-Band 6* and *Green Line Transition* put emphasis on learners' multicultural perspectives and their digital competence and interdisciplinary capability. For example, *English G-Band 6* contained a separate unit project that required students to use Internet sources and ask the history teacher to produce a presentation about African Americans. The representation of intercultural phenomena was not limited to the surface knowledge level but fostered students' interaction and critical examination of intercultural issues. For the same purpose, *Green Line Transition* had a unit which presented knowledge about digital competence. Under this topic, there were role-play exercises, film analysis, listening to the speech about how algorithms can be used, working with survey statistics, feature articles and topic tasks about writing a blog post. These different types of tasks encouraged learners to communicate their ideas and explore multifaceted perspectives by searching for identifiable cultural resources.

As for *Ying Yu*, however, it tended to be more knowledge-oriented and focused on grammatical mechanics. Although there was one separate Unit called *information and technology*, contents were merely about presenting knowledge-oriented materials and perspectives in general. Besides, most of the tasks were dancing around grammar, such as filling in blanks of sentences, completing the adjectives/compound words, and answering text-related questions. Thus, task-based activities were little found. Hence, there is a need to provide opportunities for learners to examine profound (inter-)cultural issues such as attitudes, values and beliefs at a profound level so that they are capable of gaining deeper insights into their own culture and other cultures in different sociocultural settings.

Research question 2: cultural elements within each type of culture

The second research question attempted to investigate cultural elements of source culture, target culture, international target culture and cultural-neutral types by addressing categories of person, product, perspective and practice.

Figure 2 indicates that *Ying Yu* and *English* incorporated various cultural elements and balanced among four cultural types. *Ying Yu* worked with a diversity of Chinese cultures such as Chinese cuisine and martial arts. *English* contained Chinese
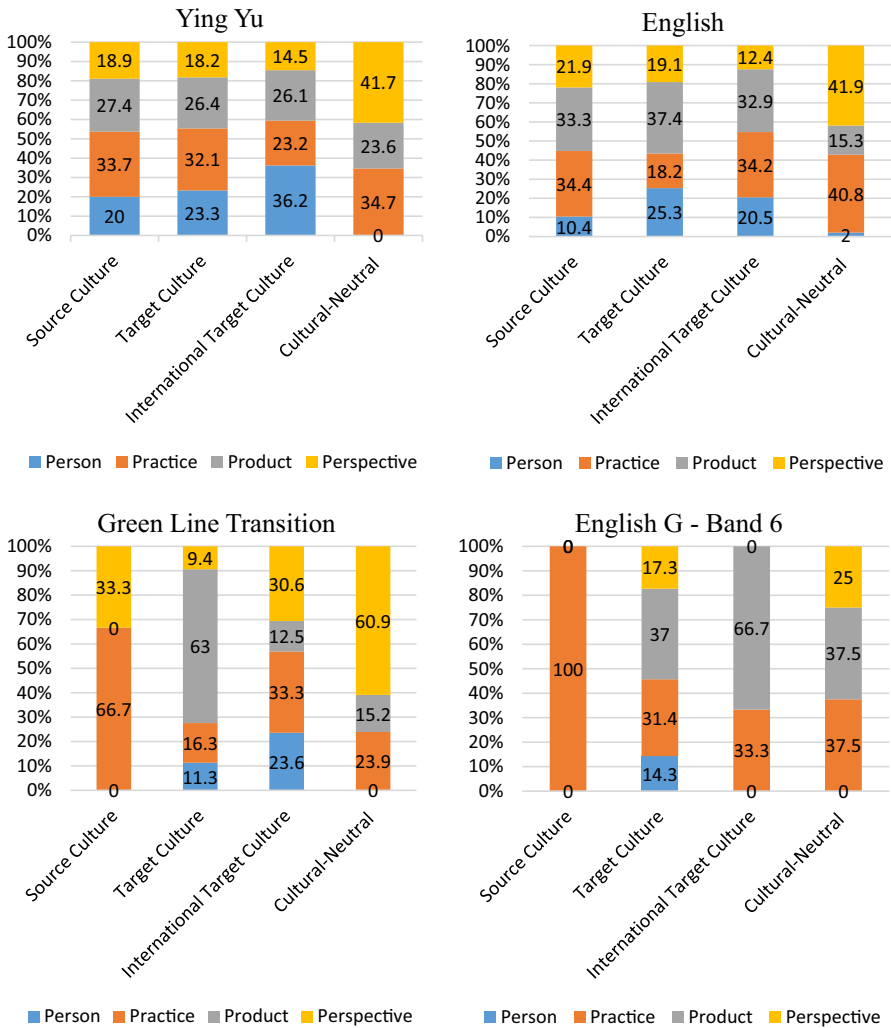
Fig. 2 Cultural elements represented in four textbook series

culture-specific and person-specific information such as an online forum, Lang Ping and natural disasters. These texts touched upon Chinese culture and familiarized students with their cultural knowledge, and further helped them communicate their own culture in English. Nevertheless, most cultural contents pertained to static cultural aspects such as traditions, folklore, everyday life and routines, cultural heritages and tourist attractions, and seemed not address profound cultural values.

Green Line Transition and *English G-Band 6* presented a large number of target cultural depictions, which covered social topics such as arranged marriage in India and unequal rights of African Americans. These texts not only presented cultural knowledge which might be involved in intercultural communication but also touched

upon deeper levels of different cultures and thus, helped students to have an in-depth understanding of cultural phenomena. Besides, some texts in both series encompassed racism, immigrants in the UK and US. However, contents in two series demonstrated a bias toward target cultural elements, probably because most texts were excerpts from literary works such as novels and fictions from native writers.

Going through four textbook series, different approaches were used to represent cultural information. For example, the topic of *teenage life* was presented in all textbook series. To illustrate relevant contents, authors of *Ying Yu* firstly listed quotations from several celebrities from the US, China, UK and India. Then literary texts that contained information of the UK, China, Canada described teenagers' daily life, including daily uses of the laptop, school life and being a volunteer teacher. Although relevant contents seemed to be presented from a global perspective, the communicative focus and critical thinking skills were ignored because these texts were diary-like genres. Consequently, students had no opportunity to delve into deeper cultural values. Nevertheless, *English* had a single Unit 1 about *teenage life*, which emphasized learners' intercultural skills. In the unit, three texts illustrated real-life issues teenagers might confront, such as study challenges, confusion and helping the poor with access to education. Upon the completion of reading, students were asked to finish a project within the team. Students could set up a student club, choose the club name, slogan and daily activities. Lastly, they were required to design a logo, make a poster and prepare an introduction to recruit members by themselves. This project developed students' capacity to mediate using effective communication strategies among team members and negotiate multiple voices within the cultural grouping.

The topic about teenage life repeatedly appeared in *Green Line Transition* and *English G-Band 6* with a communicative focus that went beyond merely factual presentation of the cultural knowledge. First, Green Line Transition dealt with going abroad, cultural differences, and student exchanges in its reading section. After the reading, students were asked to discuss intercultural matters such as dual citizenship, global citizens and the importance of understanding other cultures. Then, students were required to compare their ideas with their partners' thoughts in the class. Besides, one section called evaluation encouraged students to think about and express their views on intercultural matters. These contents encouraged students to address intercultural issues about culture shock and the problem of acclimatization to a new culture, and help them express their views from multicultural perspectives. Also, *English G-Band 6* dealt with pressure and frustrations teenagers suffer. Texts addressed teenagers' real-life issues and inspired their empathy into text characters. These contents challenge the traditional views that going to school is compulsory and asking students to develop their opinions. These activities encouraged students to challenge worldviews by thinking critically and to take responsibility for their own life. The two series of textbooks presented similar cultural information while employing different literary genres and types of tasks.

Ying Yu and *English* encompass a diversity of cultural information. Learners can not only obtain an overview of different cultures but also understand own cultural traditions and beliefs in English. Both of them seem to be congruent with current thinking that learners should engage with the target culture and their own culture

(e.g., McKay 2002). Unfortunately, most of texts present cultural information at surface level and neglect learners' critical examination and more profound beliefs. On the contrary, *Green Line Transition* and *English G-Band 6* provide opportunities for learners to gain insights into more sophisticated cultural issues so that they can respect different cultural values. However, both series seem to overlook and marginalize German source cultures.

Discussion

Recognizing the international status of English requires educators to promote the development of English learners' ability to communicate ideas and cultural beliefs in a diversity of settings. Recognition of the various contexts of English use and being able to use communication strategies effectively in English in international settings are significant for ensuring a high level of communicative competence. Thus, local and global contexts are equally crucial for English language use.

The China's English curriculum for high schools (2017) added world vision and cultural consciousness, encouraging students to expand their cultural awareness to include global, multicultural perspectives. According to the analysis results, the incorporation of international target cultural contents in English textbooks offers learners exposure to a diversity of English language settings. Thus, students are familiarized to engage with English users from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in the future.

Germans are more likely to communicate with non-native English speakers in English at work, socializing or for traveling purposes (Syrbe and Rose 2018). However, the overemphasis on Inner Circle countries in textbooks does little to prepare German students to understand the diversity of English. Moreover, Germans generally travel to Spain, Italy and Turkey in greater numbers than the UK or Ireland. They are more likely to use English with non-native speakers. Results of this study seem to be congruent with Syrbe and Rose (2018) who claim that Germany's ELT textbooks do not attach enough importance on English as the international language and thus may not truly represent German students' intercultural communication needs.

In the EIL paradigm, many English learners may learn English to share with others information about their own countries for specific purposes like promoting trade and tourism and encouraging international scholarly exchanges. Such purposes of learning and teaching English undermine the traditional relationship between learning English and Inner Circle countries (McKay 2003c). Hence, source cultures and other cultures should be equally important in English language use and learning. In terms of source culture, China's ELT textbooks examined seem to balance Chinese and other cultures to prepare students to become bilinguals with intercultural insights. Much of the cultural information includes Chinese culture in English, so this can certainly be seen as positive for students to learn more about their own culture and learn the language needed to explain these cultural elements in intercultural communication settings (McKay 2003c). Nevertheless, German cultures are primarily underestimated and under-represented in Germany's ELT textbooks. In the

future, the EIL pedagogy and English textbook designers should consider the communicative needs of German students to study English and not merely assume that English learning goals involve mimicking the cultural behavior of an English native speaker (Modiano 2001).

Lastly, depictions of knowledge-oriented culture in China's English textbooks are incongruent with the current thinking of culture, which is understood as fluid and dynamic. Most of the cultural contents in China's ELT textbooks reflect a knowledge-based level of cultural representations and ignore developing students' responsive action, which is considered as the primary goal of cultural teaching (Menard-Warwick 2009). Culture teaching becomes much more than a simple presentation of cultural facts (Shin et al. 2011). By contrast, textbooks examined for German students incorporate different types of tasks which highlight students' multicultural perspectives. Therefore, Germany's English textbooks examined showcase the fluid and dynamic nature in cultural representations.

As previously noted, ELT textbooks should make an effort to localize material contents by using learners' experiences and making teaching contents culturally responsive. It might be possible for textbook designers to replace unfamiliar target cultural contents with familiar local ones for students. Furthermore, it is essential to reiterate that ELT teachers play a vital role in supplementing textbook contents. English teachers should be encouraged to promote the integration of local and other cultures in the classroom. It might also be possible to develop teachers' textbook manuals that include specific instructions about how the English texts can be used in the learners' cultural contexts. Additionally, English teachers should expose students to the sociolinguistic diversity of today's English use. Learning about the spread of English and how English is currently used in the world will help students move beyond the native speaker norms perpetuated in textbooks and cause an increase in students' confidence as non-native English speakers.

Conclusion

This study compared and discussed cultural representations in regionally distributed English textbooks, and further addressed the gap in cross-cultural textbook analysis between China and Germany. It has demonstrated the dominance of Inner Circle cultural contents in most of the textbooks examined. It indicates that Inner Circle cultures are still more highly valued than those of the Outer and Expanding circle countries, although Chinese and German students might communicate with people from diverse languacultures (linguistic and cultural backgrounds) in international contexts. Although this study has focused on a limited series of English textbooks used in the Chinese and German high school system, it is indicative of the types of materials used in other places of China and Germany. This comparative study also provides insightful hints for textbook designers and education administrators in China and Germany to re-evaluate how to integrate EIL approaches into textbooks and allow English varieties in international communication settings.

Furthermore, China's English textbooks seem to incorporate more diverse cultural types than Germany's textbooks do, but Germany's textbook contents refer to

more multicultural perspectives to illustrate the dynamic and negotiable concept of cultures. Thus, we concur with Shin et al. (2011) that future textbooks should focus not only on cultural facts but also more profound beliefs and values. Besides, it is recommended that textbook designers put equal importance on both native and non-native speakers' cultural contents in teaching materials. Thus, students can expand their intercultural awareness and be able to critically evaluate their own and other cultures.

However, this study has limitations as well. Firstly, ELT textbooks under investigation have only four series. Future research can obtain more series to get a fuller picture of cultural representations in textbooks. Secondly, this study merely focuses on cultural representations in textbooks. If possible, future research can have interviews with front-line teachers to unpack their opinions of cultural teaching in the classroom. The English teachers probably have different insights with either cultural teaching approaches or cultural representations in teaching materials.

Data availability Raw data were generated based on the content analysis of textbooks. Derived data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author on request.

Declarations

Conflict of interest None.

Ethical approval Hereby, I consciously assure that for the manuscript A Cross-National Analysis of Cultural Representations in English Textbooks Used in China and Germany the following is fulfilled: (1) This material is the authors' own original work, which has not been previously published elsewhere. (2) The paper is not currently being considered for publication elsewhere. (3) The paper reflects the authors' own research and analysis in a truthful and complete manner. (4) The paper properly credits the meaningful contributions of co-authors and co-researchers. (5) The results are appropriately placed in the context of prior and existing research. (6) All sources used are properly disclosed (correct citation). Literally copying of text must be indicated as such by using quotation marks and giving proper reference. (7) All authors have been personally and actively involved in substantial work leading to the paper, and will take public responsibility for its content.

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