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# A study of cultural representation in Hokkien (Southern Min) textbooks

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This research employed a framework for analyzing cultural representations within textbooks to focus on the three dimensions of geographical contexts, types of cultures and modes of presentation. A quantitative analysis of Hokkien textbooks from Fujian and Taiwan was conducted. The findings revealed that, on one hand, textbooks from both regions predominantly featured Minnan culture with a marked emphasis on cultural products related to the social life and traditional culture of China. On the other hand, the Fujian textbooks tended to present culture via knowledge blocks, whereas Taiwanese textbooks used cultural discourse for cultural presentations. This distinction emphasizes the pivotal role of language education in perpetuating local cultures and values, as well as the challenges entailed in broadening the cultural scope. The outcomes of this study contribute to minimizing the impact of regional factors in textbook research and provide empirical support for enhancing the quality of Hokkien education and the cultural adaptability of teaching materials.

## KEYWORDS

Hokkien textbooks, cultural representation, regional differences, language education, textbook analysis

## 1 Introduction

The burgeoning interest in textbook research within the educational research domain has increasingly highlighted cultural presentations in textbooks as a focal area of inquiry. Scholars such as [Kaliska \(2022\)](#) and [Hao et al. \(2023\)](#) have emphasized the paramount importance of the presentation of cultural content in textbooks in various languages, including Mandarin, English and Spanish. Despite the extensive discourse on cultural presentation in textbooks, a clear consensus regarding how regional influences shape such presentations remains elusive. For example, [Kaasa et al. \(2014\)](#) explained that cultural presentations could differ significantly due to the impacts of local cultures, as well as due to the historical and societal factors in various regions.

While existing studies have delved into the cultural presentations in textbooks for the same language across different linguistic backgrounds by focusing predominantly on overall regional differences, they have often overlooked the subtle distinctions within neighboring regions in the same linguistic area. The present study introduces a novel approach by concentrating on the cultural presentation in textbooks within different regions of the same linguistic area, specifically targeting the primary areas in which the Hokkien is spoken: Fujian and Taiwan. Comparing textbooks from these two regions will not only reveal more precise cultural distinctions, but will also assist in mitigating the impact of regional factors on research conclusions.

Minnan culture represents the quintessential cultural identity of the southern regions of Fujian Province, notably encompassing areas such as Xiamen, Quanzhou, and Zhangzhou. Lin Huadong elaborates on the characteristics and core essence of Minnan culture in his work, “The Spirit and Basic Connotations of Minnan Culture,” highlighting its origins in Quanzhou, Fujian, and its gradual dissemination to other regions, facilitated by the migration of Minnan people (Lin, 2009). Using Hokkien as its medium, Minnan culture is prevalent in southern Fujian, Taiwan, and among Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, including Singapore and Malaysia. Liu Denghan, a researcher at the Fujian Academy of Social Sciences Institute of Literature, further analyzes the types and traits of Minnan culture in “On Minnan Culture: A Few Identifications about Types, Forms, and Features,” characterizing it as both a continental and maritime culture (Liu, 2003). The integration of Central Plains culture, brought by immigrants, with the local maritime culture, results in the unique cultural amalgam that defines Minnan culture.

Taiwan’s Minnan culture is both an extension and a variation of the southern Fujian culture. Taiwanese, a variant of the Hokkien influenced by local Taiwanese culture and the Japanese colonial period, has developed unique linguistic characteristics. Taiwan’s Minnan culture retains close ties with southern Fujian in religion, cuisine, and festivals. Through Chinese immigration, Minnan culture has profoundly influenced local commerce, cuisine, religion, and daily life in Southeast Asian Chinese communities such as Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines.

However, despite commonalities across various regions, Minnan culture also shows regional differences in its specific manifestations. These regional cultural differences are particularly evident in educational resources, especially textbooks. Textbooks, as crucial mediums for cultural transmission and education, not only reflect local cultural characteristics but are also profoundly shaped by regional cultures. Thus, effectively presenting different regional cultural contents in textbooks becomes a significant research topic.

Current research primarily focuses on the distribution and frequency analysis of cultural content in textbooks, with less attention to the forms of cultural presentation. There is also a lack of studies specifically addressing the cultural presentation in Hokkien textbooks, and most research on cultural presentation lacks a systematic analytical framework. Additionally, most comparative studies of textbooks have not adequately considered the impact of regional factors. These research gaps provide direction and objectives for this study.

Given these gaps in existing research, this study aims to delve into the cultural presentations in Hokkien textbooks from the Taiwan and Fujian regions to more accurately identify the cultural differences between these areas and to emphasize the importance of regional cultures in language education. The ultimate purpose of this research is to enhance educational quality and increase the cultural adaptability of teaching materials.

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 Language and culture

International scholars have proposed various classifications of culture based on a multifaceted understanding thereof. Brody (2003)

provided a seminal categorization that differentiated between high culture (“Big C”) focusing on the characteristics of a civilization, and low culture (“Small C”), which centers on the lifestyles of specific groups. Bennett et al. (2003) expanded on this notion by categorizing high and low cultures as “objective culture” and defining individuals’ worldviews, values and beliefs as “subjective culture.” The framework of the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (1996) further divided culture into products (Big C), practices (Small C) and perspectives (subjective culture). Moran and Lu (2001) also included people and communities as cultural elements.

The discourse on the correlation between language and culture has been marked by vigorous debate. Language serves not only as a carrier of culture (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006) but also imbues language with meaning. Risager (2006) emphasized that the connection between the two was formed in every communicative event. Given this indivisibility, textbooks have become a crucial source for providing target-language input and cultural knowledge in second language education (Canale, 2016). With a deepening understanding of the impact of culture on language learning and teaching, empirical studies have increasingly focused on the representation of culture in second language textbooks, and have mainly used the methods of content analysis, critical discourse analysis and multimodal analysis (Xiong and Peng, 2021). These empirical investigations have not only enriched the understanding of cultural teaching in contemporary language education, but have also introduced diversity into academia. It is important to note that the aforementioned studies have played a key role in promoting intercultural understanding and intercultural communication in language education (Byram et al., 2002).

### 2.2 Cultural representation in textbooks

In recent years, research on cultural representation in language textbooks has mainly focused on two aspects, namely analyzing the cultural content in foreign language textbooks and studying the modes of cultural presentation. Byram (1993) devised a checklist for cultural content and proposed eight categories of cultural content to assess the distribution within textbooks, and included social identities, social groups, beliefs, behaviors, social interactions, sociopolitical institutions, socialization life cycles, stereotypes, and national identities, history, and geography. Furthermore, scholars such as Keles and Yazan (2023) conducted historical analyses of different editions of the same textbook series.

However, few studies have considered regional and cultural interference factors that could affect the credibility and effectiveness of research conclusions. Moreover, few studies have utilized a dedicated framework for analyzing cultural representation. Kumaravadivelu (2008) also highlighted the inadequacy of most studies in terms of content-level considerations of intercultural and intercultural values. In addition, in her study of popular German textbooks in the United States, Kramsch (1995) found that, despite authors’ attempts to teach culture through dialogue, reading and language exercises, the lack of a deep understanding and critical evaluations of the students’ own cultures led to ineffective methods for cultural presentations.

Research on Hokkien textbooks has mainly focused on content, arrangement characteristics, and the difficulty of the exercises (Fuehrer and Chi, 2016; Guo, 2019), as well as the compatibility of

Hokkien teaching with educational policies (Wu, 2021; Hsieh and Hsieh, 2022). However, these studies have largely discussed language education from a macro perspective, and lack empirical research on cultural representations in textbooks.

Based on the literature review, the existing literature has four main research gaps: Firstly, most studies have concentrated on the distribution of the cultural content that is presented in textbooks, with relatively fewer studies focusing on the forms of cultural presentation. Secondly, there is a lack of research on cultural representation in Hokkien textbooks. In addition, most studies of cultural presentation lack effective, scientific frameworks for analyses. Lastly, most of the comparative studies of textbooks have not fully considered the impact of regional factors.

Therefore, the aim of this study was to conduct an empirical investigation into the cultural representations in Hokkien textbooks to answer the following research questions:

- 1 What are the differences and connections in the representation of different cultural geographies and cultural types in Hokkien textbooks?
- 2 Which characteristics of the Minnan culture are presented in textbooks?
- 3 How are these cultures represented in textbooks?

## 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Initiative research background and textbook selection

In Mainland China, the inheritance and promotion of excellent indigenous cultures represent a shared mission and a contemporary responsibility across all educational stages, as emphasized by the [General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and General Office of the State Council \(2017\)](#). Similarly, in Taiwan, safeguarding the cultural rights of minority groups not only assists in preventing the loss of native languages caused by previous monolingual language policies, but also fosters the creation of a multilingual environment in which the histories and cultures of diverse groups can be transmitted (108 Curriculum, Native Languages). To support this aim, both Fujian and Taiwan have incorporated the Hokkien into their official curricula for compulsory education to ensure that students have the opportunity to learn their native language on an on-going basis.

Despite their geographical proximity, Fujian and Taiwan exhibit significant differences in their political backgrounds. A key question this study addresses is whether these political differences impact the treatment of Minnan culture in textbooks from both regions. Research suggests that educational policy is influenced by a variety of factors, including politics, economy, society, and culture (Wang et al., 2018). While political factors do play a role in the formulation of educational policies, they are not the sole determinants.

The formulation of educational policies is influenced by multiple factors, including cultural values, economic needs, social trends, and global educational movements (Tsai, 2020). Policy evolution and adjustment are often responses to these dynamic contexts (Shui, 2006). For instance, Taiwan revised its elementary curriculum

standards, incorporating “local teaching activities” to address social and cultural demands. This adjustment highlights that educational policies adapt and change according to practical circumstances. Taiwan emphasizes multicultural education, opposing assimilationist practices that eradicate native languages while encouraging students to freely choose and develop their linguistic skills (Kasai, 2024). These adjustments are primarily responses to cultural and societal needs rather than purely political influences.

Similarly, Fujian’s Minjiang University has established a comprehensive dialect cultural education system, promoting the inheritance of dialect culture through education and incorporating the Minnan language and its rich cultural heritage into relevant programs (Minjiang University, 2022). This indicates that Fujian’s educational policies also actively respond to and protect local culture, aiming to achieve cultural transmission and revitalization.

Therefore, although Fujian and Taiwan differ politically, their educational policies predominantly reflect their respective cultural value orientations and educational goals. The political differences have not decisively influenced the portrayal of Minnan culture in textbooks from both regions. Instead, the educational policies of both regions exhibit a high degree of consistency in their efforts to preserve and transmit culture. Consequently, this study hypothesizes that differences in political backgrounds do not decisively impact the cultural presentations in textbooks from both regions.

This study focused on two sets of Hokkien textbooks for junior high schools, one textbook that is used Fujian and another that is used in Taiwan, hereafter referred to as T1 and T2, respectively. The research included a comparative educational methodology and a content analysis. The selection of these textbooks was based on three criteria: Firstly, the textbooks were compiled recently and were aligned with current language teaching demands to ensure the timeliness of the research findings. Secondly, both sets of textbooks had significant market shares in the Hokkien teaching fields in their respective regions and had been officially recognized by local education departments, which ensured their strong representativeness. Lastly, the textbooks were compiled based on the Outline of Basic Education Curriculum Reform and the Outline of the Twelve-Year National Basic Education Curriculum, which aim to ensure cultural diversity and to revitalize native languages by integrating language training and cultural competency organically (National Academy for Educational Research, 2014).

With regard to the materials, this study involved two sets of Hokkien textbooks; that is, four books in total, with each set comprising six to nine thematic units. Although the number of books in T1 and T2 differed, given the similarities in educational levels and cultural content in the two regions, the richness of the themes covered by both was considered to be comparable (Table 1).

### 3.2 Analysis: methods and processes

The conceptual framework, *Framework for Analyzing the Representation of Cultures in English Textbooks (FARCET)* (Zhang and Li, 2022), adopted by this studies shown in Table 2 to reveal the variation of the cultural representation in textbooks both concerning the cultural contents and their forms by calculating the Gross Cultural Representation (GCR) of culture items, which indicates the cultural items’ represented level. This framework synthesized classifications of cultural content from previous research.

TABLE 1 Textbook Information Sheet.

Textbook name	Region	Publisher	Year of publication	Level	Number of volumes	Number of units	Abbreviation
Minnan dialect and culture	Fujian	Fujian Children and Teenagers Publishing House	2018	Junior high school	1	6	T1
Minnan dialects	Taiwan	Zhenping Enterprise Co.	Republic of China 110 years	Junior high school	3	9	T2

TABLE 2 Dimensions of cultural presentation content.

Cultural content	Geographical category	Native language culture	
		Target-language culture	
		International culture	
		Shared culture	
	Culture type	Cultural products	
		Cultural practices	
		Cultural perspectives	
		Cultural communities	
Cultural presentation	Explicit	Cultural discourse	
		Cultural knowledge board	
		Pictures/Quotes	
		Background cultural information	
	Implicit	Activities/ Exercises	Language practice
			Cultural comprehension
			Cultural expression

As shown in Table 2 above, the dimensions of cultural representation content include geographical categories (such as native culture, target-language culture, international culture and shared culture), types of culture (such as cultural products, cultural practices, cultural perspectives and cultural communities), and modes of cultural presentation (explicit and implicit, e.g., cultural discourse, activities/exercises and so on).

The original FARCET, which was designed for English textbooks that were published in China for non-native English learners, was adapted for this study because the Hokkien textbooks (T1 and T2) target both native and non-native speakers. The geographical categories were modified to include the target-language culture, the Other culture and the Shared culture, with the target-language culture referring specifically to the Minnan culture; this was further divided into social life, traditional culture and contemporary China. International culture refers to a culture that does not have a significant national or ethnic background and lacks obvious regional differences. Shared culture refers to cultural elements that transcend multiple cultural backgrounds and are widely accepted and shared across different regions.

### 3.2.1 Coder background and training process

The coder for this study is the researcher themselves, who possesses extensive knowledge of Hokkien and culture. Prior to

coding, systematic learning and training were conducted to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the coding standards and process.

### 3.2.2 Coding process

Given that the number of textbook settings under the same language level differs between Fujian and Taiwan, to compare the cultural presentations between the two more fairly, this study employs an averaging method for quantitative comparison. The specific research steps are as follows:

- 1 Identifying and coding cultural content: Discourse served as the basic coding unit, including texts, dialogues and sentences. If images accompanied texts, they were considered as a single coding unit. Cultural items in both sets of textbooks were searched page by page and coded.
- 2 Self-Consistency Check: To ensure the consistency of preliminary coding, the researcher randomly selected 20% of the texts and images for re-coding at the beginning of the coding process and calculated the consistency index (e.g., Cohen's Kappa). The results indicated a high degree of consistency (Cohen's Kappa=0.91). Any inconsistencies identified in the coding were repeatedly reviewed and adjusted until consensus was reached.
- 3 Assigning weights: Explicit items were assigned a weight of 1–10 points, and implicit items were assigned 1–5 points based on different modes of cultural presentation (Zhang and Li, 2022). Taking explicit presentation as an example, if an article comprehensively discusses Minnan earthen buildings, this discourse is assigned a weight of 10 points, as this represents the strongest form of explicit cultural presentation. If an article introduces two cultural products, Douli hats and Hui women's attire, with balanced coverage, each cultural product is weighted at 8 points. As for implicit presentation, consider a listening exercise that requires students to write down Minnan sentences they hear. Although the text is related to Minnan culture, its focus is on testing students' language abilities, serving to enhance language application rather than directly promoting cultural awareness in the curriculum. Therefore, this type of cultural presentation is categorized as implicit, with a weight of 1 point.
- 4 Calculating the GCR: the formula that was used was “weight (W) x frequency (F) = GCR,” where GCR reflects the degree or level of cultural presentation.
- 5 Calculating Averages: Calculate the average General Cultural Representation (GCR) for textbooks from Fujian and Taiwan to facilitate quantitative comparison. This method helps to minimize comparison biases caused by differing numbers of textbooks.

TABLE 3 Coding examples.

Content	Country category	Presentation	Page	Form	Form	Weight	Frequency	GCR
Zhuangyuan Hongdiao	Minnan culture (traditional culture)	Products	13	Explicit	Cultural Discourse	8	1	8
Gezi opera	Minnan culture (traditional culture)	Products	4	Explicit	Pictures	2	1	2
Throw fairy coins	Minnan culture (traditional culture)	Practice	22	Explicit	Cultural Discourse	4	1	4
Squid ball	Minnan culture (society and lifestyles)	Products	98	Implicit	Language Practice (cultural expression)	4	1	4
Worshiping the Jade Emperor	Minnan culture (society and lifestyles)	Practice	10	Implicit	Language Practice (Cultural Expression)	8	1	8
Joseph Needham	Other culture	Persons	83	Implicit	Language Practice (Cultural Expression)	2	1	2
Xu Beihong	Other culture	Persons	38	Implicit	Language Practice (Cultural Understanding)	4	1	4
Chinese New Year	Shared culture	Practice	17	Explicit	Background Cultural Information	1	1	1
Filial piety	Shared culture	Perspectives	7	Implicit	Language Practice (Cultural Expression)	4	1	4

This methodological approach ensured a thorough and nuanced analysis of cultural representation in Hokkien textbooks with the aim of revealing the depth and breadth of cultural content and its presentation in the educational context of Fujian and Taiwan (Table 3).

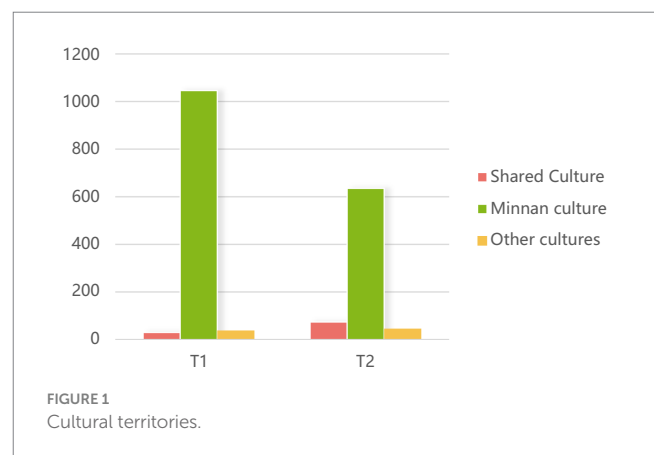
## 4 Results

### 4.1 Cultural geography

The findings were that Hokkien textbooks, while mainly presenting Minnan culture, also reflected an imbalanced distribution among the Minnan culture, other cultures and shared cultures. In T1, the representation of Minnan culture by volume reached 1,046, while shared culture and other cultures only attained 30 and 38, respectively. By contrast, in T2, the representation of the Minnan culture by volume was 635, with other cultures and shared cultures attaining 74 and 46, respectively. The cultural geography categories in T1 and T2, listed according to representation frequency, were the Minnan culture, shared culture and other cultures. In T1, the other cultures were mainly cultures in Mainland China, such as Hakka, Shandong (Qi-Lu) and Sichuan (Ba-Shu) cultures; the other cultures in T2 included more international cultures, such as Hong Kong, Macau, Japan, Thailand, France and so on (Figure 1).

### 4.2 Cultural types

With regard to cultural types, the analysis revealed that the highest GCR values in both T1 and T2 pertained to cultural products, with scores of 664 and 495, respectively. Following this, cultural practices were

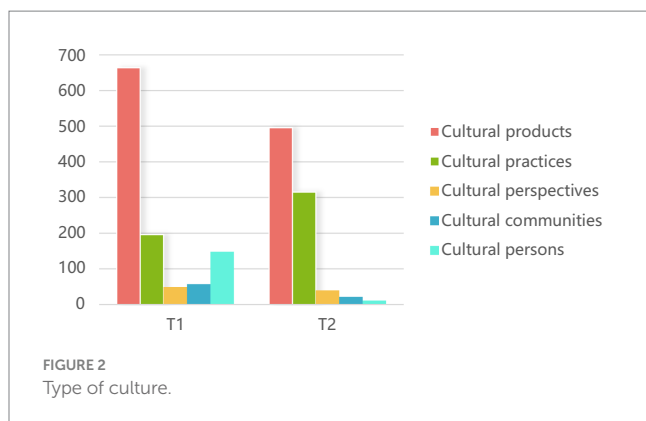


ranked second, with T1 recording a GCR of 196, and T2 a significantly higher score of 315. The lowest GCR values were attributed to cultural perspectives (49) in T1 and cultural figures (11) in T2 (Figure 2).

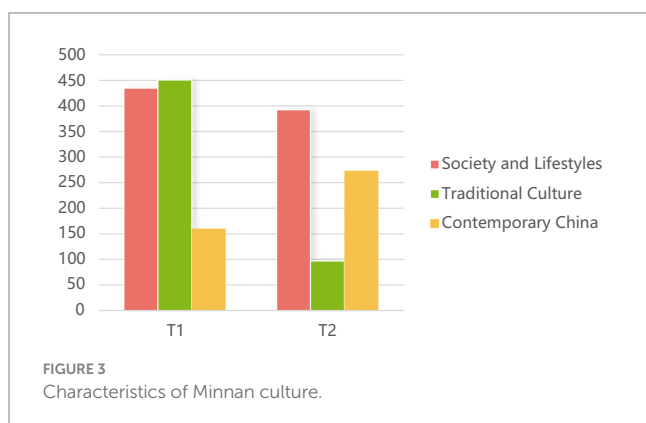
### 4.3 Characteristics of Minnan culture

An analysis of the content within Hokkien textbooks from Fujian Province (T1) and Taiwan (T2) discloses discernible divergences in educational focus that reflect the distinctive regional approaches to language instruction. In T1, the frequency of topics addressing ‘Society and Lifestyles’ is recorded at 435, closely followed by ‘Traditional Culture’ with a frequency of 451. In stark contrast, ‘Contemporary China’ is the least represented category, with a mere 160 occurrences. On the other hand, T2 showcases a pronounced elevation in the representation of ‘Society and Lifestyles’, which sees a





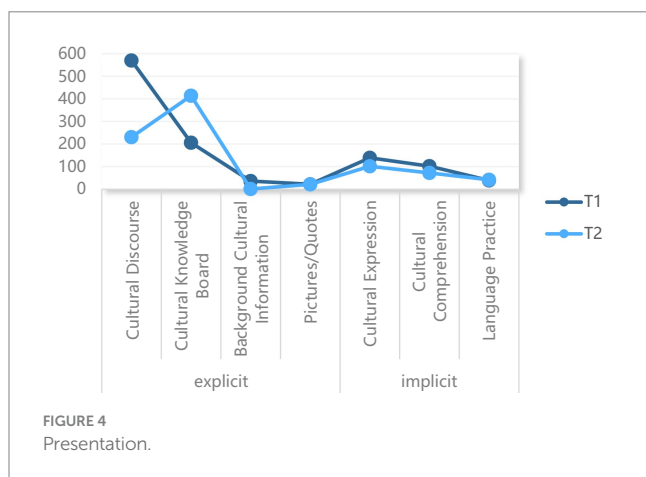
With regard to specific content, both sets of textbooks encompassed a diverse range of cultural products including, but not limited to, quintessential foods, tourist attractions and literary arts. For example, T1 has references to culinary items such as oyster omelettes, pineapple cakes and satay noodles, while T2 mentions pig blood soup, taro puffs and sugar cakes — as cultural learning materials, both of these selections are comprehensible and are aligned with middle school students’ cognitive development. Furthermore, the focus on cultural practices in T1 and T2 is predominantly on Minnan folk activities, with T2 extending its coverage to include cultural activities from other nations, such as Japanese volunteer work and Thai cultural festivals. In terms of Minnan cultural representation, T1 is mainly centered on traditional culture, whereas T2 places greater emphasis on social life.



### 4.4 Methods of presentation

The research revealed that the proportion of explicit cultural representations was higher than was that of implicit cultural representations in both sets of textbooks. However, there are differences in the methods of cultural presentation in the two textbooks, and each exhibits distinct characteristics.

In terms of explicit cultural representations, cultural discourses had the highest GCR values in T1, while the images/introduction sections had the lowest GCR values. The cultural discourses in T1 predominantly consist of argumentative and narrative texts, with a greater focus on introducing cultural content. By contrast, the cultural knowledge sections in T2 had the highest GCR values, while background information had the lowest GCR values. Cultural discourses are presented in dialogue form in T2, and are mainly used to guide the students’ understanding of themes, thus establishing dedicated cultural knowledge sections for the detailed introduction of cultural content. The lower GCR value for the images/introduction sections in T1 was due to the simplicity of the illustrations and their textual accompaniment usually pertaining to the same theme. The introduction of background information is restricted in T2 because the existing narratives in the cultural sections are quite comprehensive.



With regard to implicit cultural representations, both T1 and T2 had the highest GCR values for cultural expression, with the lowest GCR values for language practice. This indicates that there is greater emphasis on examining cultural understanding and application in both textbooks, rather than simply focusing on the accuracy of language use. For example, T1 includes exercises requiring students to give speeches in the Hokkien about folk activities, whereas the exercises in T2 require students to describe their feelings about watching traditional Taiwanese operas.

frequency of 1,178, and ‘Contemporary China’, which escalates to 820. This is juxtaposed with a diminished emphasis on ‘Traditional Culture’, which decreases to a frequency of 291.

The data suggests that the Fujian textbook places a nuanced preference on ‘Traditional Culture’, potentially indicative of a regional predilection for sustaining and highlighting ancestral customs and values. In juxtaposition, the Taiwanese textbook significantly amplifies content related to ‘Contemporary China’ and ‘Society and Lifestyles’, which could denote an educational prerogative to engage with the present-day societal fabric and the prevailing lifestyles, consistent with Taiwan’s pedagogical orientation towards contemporaneity and global integration (Figure 3).

In summary, cultural discourses and cultural knowledge sections are the most common forms of explicit cultural representation in both sets of textbooks. In the exercises, cultural expression questions represent the most characteristic form of implicit representation (Figure 4).

### 5 Discussion

This study presented a thorough examination of the cultural representation in Hokkien textbooks via the selected framework to show that both sets of materials predominantly feature target-language

TABLE 4 Key differences in cultural representation between T1 and T2.

Aspect	T1	T2
Cultural categories	Traditional culture, shared culture	Social life, contemporary China
Cultural perspective	National-centric	Emphasis on social life and global cultural integration
Teaching methods	Knowledge-oriented, narrative texts	Language-oriented, everyday dialogues
Cultural products	Traditional festival foods	Modern everyday foods
Educational focus	Emphasis on Chinese dialects' commonalities	Emphasis on Hokkien, real life, and culture
Cross-cultural competence	Relatively conservative stance	Emphasis on cultural diversity
Interaction with other cultures	Potentially overlooked	Emphasis on interaction and integration
Global trends	Less evident	Reflects current trends

regional cultures, which is in line with the findings of Liu et al. (2015) and of Motschenbacher (2019).

Research Question 1: What are the differences and connections in the representation of different cultural geographies and cultural types in Hokkien textbooks?

To provide a clear comparison of the cultural representation in the Hokkien textbooks, the following table summarizes the key findings of this study (Table 4).

The relationship between dialects and regional culture is complex and profound. According to previous studies, dialects serve as unique links connecting the past and present, individuals and society, as well as local and national contexts (Han, 2024). The T1 textbooks not only encompass traditional culture but also focus on shared culture, reflecting a national-centric cultural perspective. This perspective emphasizes the commonalities and connections among various Chinese dialects, primarily to enhance national identity and highlight local distinctiveness. However, as international multiculturalism continues to grow, this relatively conservative cultural stance, while promoting national cultural identity, may overlook the interactions and integrations of Minnan culture with other regional cultures. This oversight could hinder the broader dissemination and development of Minnan culture on an international scale.

By contrast, the T2 materials exhibit a more open and inclusive cultural attitude, particularly in the sections that address cross-cultural misunderstandings. These scenarios reflect the role of the Hokkien in diverse linguistic contexts, emphasize the importance of understanding cultural diversity and offer new perspectives regarding the dissemination of the Hokkien and its interaction with global cultures, which is in line with the current trends of globalization and intercultural integration (Risager, 2021). In the context of increasing globalization, a balanced representation of different cultures is essential for cultivating students' cross-cultural competencies and global perspectives. A lack of cultural content is not beneficial for students to deepen their understanding of local culture, target language culture, and culture of area-specific countries through reading cultural texts and analyzing cultural differences, and will make learners unable to get in touch with real cultural situations and affect their understanding of specific cultural characteristics (Tajeddin and Teimournezhad, 2015). Culture in the textbooks should provide learners with not only linguistic knowledge but also knowledge of intercultural communication so that one can build a bridge between cultural differences (Samovar et al., 2013). Thus highlighting the need for a more balanced portrayal of international and other cultures in Hokkien textbooks.

Research Question 2: Which characteristics of the Minnan culture are presented in textbooks?

It is noteworthy that, in terms of regional culture, both T1 and T2 primarily focus on Hokkien culture. This is consistent with previous research findings indicating that teaching materials mainly represent the target language culture (Bose and Gao, 2022). However, T1 primarily emphasize traditional culture, aligning with policy requirements. In contrast, T2 prioritize the presentation of Society and Lifestyles and Contemporary China, with traditional culture being secondary. This reflects the belief of some scholars that textbook content should be centered on student interests. Modern children, immersed in a technological and urbanized environment, are more motivated by content that relates closely to their daily lives. Furthermore, traditional culture alone does not fully represent the local people's habits and should not lead to cultural misunderstandings (Yang et al., 2021).

In an increasingly globalized world, presenting a balanced view of different cultures in Hokkien textbooks is essential for fostering students' cross-cultural abilities and global perspectives. It is argued that international and other cultures should be represented more equitably in these textbooks to reflect a diverse and interconnected world (Baker, 2009). Effective cultural teaching should respect and preserve tradition while also addressing the current relevance and evolution of culture.

Research Question 3: How are these cultures represented in textbooks?

In examining the types and representations of culture, this study found that cultural products in T1 exhibit the highest GCR, consistent with recent research findings (Yuen, 2011; Davidson and Liu, 2020). T1 textbooks emphasize traditional festival foods, while T2 textbooks focus on everyday modern foods. The significant difference between the two reflects a delicate balance between historical legacy and contemporary life in cultural education, underscoring the importance of balancing these aspects for effective cultural teaching. The reason for this result may be that cultural products are the most easily recognizable material form of culture as well as the most visible and immediate cultural content (Moran and Lu, 2001), which is easy for students to understand and at the same time, easy for teachers to implement cultural instruction.

From the perspective of cultural presentation, different modes of representation reflect distinct educational objectives and methodologies. In the T1 textbooks, narrative texts primarily introduce and explain Minnan culture through language and text, indicating a knowledge-oriented educational approach. T1 may

be influenced by the introverted culture in China, so students are more encouraged to understand culture rather than express it. In contrast, T2 integrates cultural content into various activities or tasks, adopting the format of everyday dialogues, thereby reflecting a language-oriented teaching perspective. Language education in Taiwan places greater emphasis on pragmatics and expression, particularly in the context of dialect preservation and transmission, where active speaking is crucial for extending from linguistic practice to cultural understanding (Yang et al., 2021). These differences may be attributed to the specific educational environments and requirements of each textbook. Regardless of the methods used by textbooks to cultivate students' intercultural communicative competence (ICC), they should adhere to the principles proposed by Nguyen (2011): textbooks should provide learners not only with speech act information but also with contextual and pragmatic information, as well as explanations of usage scenarios, striving for the accuracy, practicality, and appropriateness of this information. From the learners' perspective, further empirical research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of different modes of presentation in fostering intercultural competencies.

## 6 Recommendation

To enhance the cultural adaptability of textbooks, the following measures are recommended:

Teachers in Fujian and Taiwan should adjust their teaching strategies according to the specific contexts of their regions to achieve optimal cultural education outcomes. In Fujian, teachers should focus on enriching traditional cultural content by deeply exploring and explaining traditional cultural stories and customs. This approach can enhance students' understanding and identification with Minnan culture. For instance, organizing cultural theme activities and visits to historical sites can provide students with firsthand experiences of traditional culture. Additionally, employing Augmented Reality (AR) technology to virtually present historical and cultural scenes can help students better comprehend and remember traditional culture through immersive experiences. Although Fujian textbooks emphasize traditional culture, it is also essential to incorporate social life elements into teaching. By integrating real-life examples, teachers can explain the application of modern Minnan culture in societal contexts, thereby helping students connect classroom knowledge with real-life situations and improving learning outcomes.

In Taiwan, teachers should strengthen the integration of traditional culture and social life content in their teaching. Designing tasks and projects that involve real-life activities can promote interactive cultural learning. For example, organizing students to participate in community activities and social surveys can deepen their cultural understanding through practical experiences. To enhance learning outcomes, teachers can apply Virtual Reality (VR) technology to merge classroom cultural teaching with real-life scenarios, allowing students to intuitively feel and understand cultural content through immersive VR experiences. Although Taiwanese textbooks primarily focus on social life, teachers should also incorporate systematic modules of traditional cultural knowledge to ensure students gain a

comprehensive understanding of historical culture. Enriching the curriculum through special lectures and traditional culture exhibitions can further enhance students' cultural literacy.

Textbook authors should consider different educational goals and methods when developing textbooks. To better cultivate students' intercultural competence, textbook authors should design interactive, experiential, cross-cultural, and task-based cultural exercises. This approach can effectively foster students' cross-cultural learning and understanding (Zu, 2018). Additionally, project-based learning, case-based learning, and problem-based learning activities can engage students in planned actions and deepen their understanding of culture through reflective activities. Lee and Li (2020) emphasize incorporating students' own cultures into the learning process. By facilitating communication, interaction, and project-based learning, students can reflect on both the positive and negative aspects of their own and foreign cultures, thereby promoting social change.

Moreover, textbooks should include deeper content that explains real-life practices and patterns, aiming for the "intercultural authenticity" proposed by Feng and Byram (2002) and Kozlova and Ryabichenko (2023). To enhance the cultural adaptability of textbooks, it is recommended to increase the diversity of cultural content by incorporating more regional cultural elements, particularly those historically connected to Minnan culture, such as cultural features from Southeast Asian countries. This enrichment can help students better understand and respect different cultural backgrounds.

Educational authorities should establish a regular review and update system for textbook content to ensure that textbooks reflect the latest cultural developments and adapt to the evolving educational needs and cultural environment. This dynamic updating mechanism will help maintain the curriculum's relevance and effectiveness in cultivating students' appreciation of both historical and contemporary cultural dynamics. Educational authorities should also support and promote the use of modern technology and diverse methods in teaching by textbook authors and teachers to enhance students' learning experiences and cultural understanding.

## 7 Conclusion

This study aimed to delve deeply into the cultural representations in Hokkien textbooks from the Taiwan and Fujian regions to accurately identify cultural differences between these areas, and to emphasize the importance of regional culture in language education. Through a comprehensive analysis of the cultural content in Hokkien textbooks, this research revealed both commonalities and differences in cultural geography, types and presentation methods between the two regions, thereby providing empirical evidence for understanding and improving Hokkien education.

The results indicate that, overall, Hokkien textbooks are remarkably successful in highlighting regional cultural characteristics, particularly in promoting Minnan culture, Chinese social life and traditional culture. This finding affirms the research objective of emphasizing the importance of regional culture in language education through cultural representations in textbooks. However, the study also found that shared culture and other



cultures were presented less frequently in textbooks, indicating room for improvement in enhancing the cultural adaptability of textbooks and broadening cultural perspectives. The analyses of explicit and implicit forms of cultural representations further demonstrate the diversity of cultural representations in textbooks, but also point to a potential need for the more balanced integration of these two forms. In terms of internal differences in Hokkien textbooks, textbooks from the Taiwan region (T2) exhibited greater diversity and a more modern tendency with regard to cultural types and methods of presentation, particularly highlighting the openness and inclusiveness of international culture. By contrast, textbooks from the Fujian region (T1) focused more on promoting traditional culture and national identity, thus showing respect for historical and traditional values. These internal differences not only reveal the differences in educational philosophies and socio-cultural backgrounds in the two regions, but also highlight the challenges and opportunities in order for Minnan language textbooks to be adapted to intercultural needs and to promote cultural exchanges.

A limitation of this study is its focus on textbooks from the Fujian and Taiwan regions. Future research could consider expanding the scope to include textbooks from more regions to gain a deeper understanding of the methods of cultural representation in textbooks across different regions in which the same language is spoken. In addition, future research should explore how cultural representations in textbooks affect students' cultural cognition and attitudes, as well as the practical applications for teaching.

Overall, the findings of this study provide new perspectives and theoretical foundations for the compilation of and teaching methods for Hokkien textbooks. This research not only identified cultural differences within Hokkien textbooks, but also revealed potential paths for enhancing educational quality and cultural adaptability. Future research should continue to explore ways of presenting cultural content more comprehensively and in a balanced way in Hokkien and other language textbooks to promote students' understanding of and respect for interculturalism, thereby advancing the development of and innovations in language education.

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## Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author/s.

## Author contributions

YH: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. HS: Methodology, Supervision, Writing – review & editing.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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