

Analysis of Minority Culture Elements in Chinese Textbooks Compiled by the Ministry of Education for Primary Schools

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Abstract: The minority culture elements presented in the Chinese textbooks play an instrumental role for students to fully understand and form correct perception of the extraordinary cultures of the Chinese ethnic minorities, as well as national cultural values. At the same time, it leaves room for further contemplation and discussion in terms of the comprehensive coverage of ethnic minority cultures, a more balanced presentation and verified perspective.

1. Introduction

China is a unified multi-ethnic country. Ethnic minority people and the Han people joined hand creating the splendid Chinese culture in the course of its historical development. Understanding and respecting each other's cultures and accepting different cultures with an open mind are the basis for establishing an equal, solidary relationship which is mutually beneficial among all ethnic groups. In this respect, school education plays an important role. Compared with all other subjects offered in Chinese schools, Chinese is the most concentrated embodiment of the selective transmission of mainstream culture,^[1] and the culture reflected in Chinese textbooks affects the formation of students' cultural values and cultural mindset. The presentation of ethnic minority cultures in Chinese textbooks is conducive to students' comprehensive understanding of the excellent cultures of various ethnic groups and the formation of a correct perception of ethnic culture and cultural values, it also plays a significant role in promoting mutual respects and tolerance among different ethnic groups. In light of this, this paper selects the primary school Chinese textbook published by People's Education Press as the research object. The 12-volume textbooks for primary schools from grade 1-6 have been used nationwide since the autumn semester of 2017. By analyzing the contents and presentation methods of minority cultural elements in the textbook, we can understand the characteristics of the way minority cultural elements presented in the teaching materials, and put forward our thoughts and suggestions.

2. Analysis of the Contents and Presentation of Ethnic Minority Cultural Elements in Textbooks

The contents of ethnic minority cultural elements in the Chinese textbooks for primary schools compiled by the Ministry of Education can be summarized as follows:

2.1 Introduction of Ethnic Minority Names

The names of various ethnic minority groups are a basic element of the national culture. China is a unified multi-ethnic country composed of 56 ethnic groups, and there are 55 ethnic minorities besides the Han. In the whole set of Chinese textbooks for primary schools compiled by the Ministry of Education, one ancient ethnic minority name, Chile, and eight modern ethnic minorities, Dai, Jingpo, Achang, Deang, Dai, Uygur, Mongol and Ewenki are mentioned.

For example, descriptions such as "Dai people's annual Water-sprinkling Festival is coming" is

found in “Unforgettable Water-Sprinkling Festival” (the first volume of the second grade) and “pupils of Han nationality, Dai nationality, Jingpo nationality, Achang nationality and De Ang nationality are coming this way” appears in “The primary school under the big green tree” (the first volume of the third grade)

2.2 Description of the Natural Scenery of Ethnic Minority Regions

China’s ethnic minorities mainly live in the western part of China, where the natural landscape is unique. Dominating scenery in the northwest is mostly grasslands and deserts, inhabited mainly by the Mongolian, Uyghur and other ethnic minorities; There are plateaus and hills in the southwest, mainly inhabited by Tibetan, Dai and other ethnic minorities.

Direct descriptions of natural scenery of ethnic minority regions are quite abundant in primary school Chinese textbooks compiled by the Ministry of Education. For example, in the article Tianshan Mountains in July (part ii) for fourth graders, vivid description of breath-taking landscapes from deserts, snowy mountains, the waterfalls, to the creeks sparks readers’ imagination.

2.3 Description of the Diet and Clothing of Ethnic Minorities

Food culture and clothing culture are closely related to the geographical environment of different ethnic groups and their own cultural traditions, they also directly reflect the unique cultural characteristics of each ethnic group. In the textbooks, representative diets and costumes of ethnic minorities are also well demonstrated. For example, “milk tea”, “milk curd” and “hand-grabbed mutton” mentioned in the article of Grassland, are the traditional delicacies of Mongolian and Ewenki. In “The Unforgettable Water-Splashing Festival”, “Premier Zhou is wearing a white gown with a pair of skirts, coffee pants and a water-red turban on his head”, the typical clothes for an adult Dai male. The illustration of “I Went to School” (Volume 1, Grade 1) depicts the scene of 56 children of different ethnic groups wearing their own ethnic clothes on school day. The children's clothes are colorful and the accessories are delicate and beautiful.

2.4 Ethnic Minority Folk Festivals

Folk festival is an important medium for national culture. Moral concepts, values included, of a nation will be inherited and carried forward in folk festivals^[2]. Folk festivals are also an important window to understand the culture of ethnic minorities. In the article “Unforgettable Water-Sprinkling Festival”, the Water-sprinkling Festival, the most solemn and grand festival of Dai people, is thoroughly described. The fact that people celebrate it by pouring water on each other symbolizing washing away bad luck and embracing good luck.

2.5 Introduction of Ethnic Minority Arts

Ethnic art forms also contain rich ethnic culture content, music, dance, arts and craftwork help to deepen the understanding of ethnic culture. The article “Tibetan Opera” (the second volume of the sixth grade) introduces the origin and features of Tibetan opera enabling the readers to appreciate the different characters masks of different colors represent. Readers may be overwhelmed by the one of a kind charm of Tibetan arts.

2.6 The Image and Spiritual Quality of Ethnic Minority Characters

The images of ethnic minority people, their stories, and their beliefs and spiritual qualities are also important components of ethnic minority culture, which need to be understood. The two articles in the textbook, “Helibu the Hunter” (Volume 1, Grade 5) and “Grassland”, are all about the Mongolian people.

The former tells the story of the hunter Helibu sacrificing his life to save his fellow villagers, and the latter describes the hospitality “I” received from the Mongolian people. The two articles show us the great qualities of kindness, down-to-earth, caring and passionate that define Mongolian people from two perspectives and help deepened our understanding of Mongolian people’s thought.

In conclusion, the presenting of ethnic minority cultural elements in the whole set of the elementary school Chinese textbooks covers material level such as food and clothing culture,

behavioral level such as etiquette, institutional level including education and culture, and psychological level, such as the collective mindset of certain groups.

Meanwhile, the textbooks also have its own features in terms of the way ethnic cultural elements are presented. The construction of the textbooks adopted the “two organizational unit configuration”,^[3] methodology around the subject and take into account the needs for students' pragmatic development, each textbook consists of six parts: “text”, “Chinese garden”, “Extensive reading”, “oral communication”, “Writing Task”, “comprehensive study”. Our statistical results reveal the specific components involving ethnic minority cultural elements are as follows:

First, “text” accounts for the largest proportion of the textbooks, and is also the main content that students learn. In the Chinese textbooks for primary schools compiled by the Ministry of Education, three to four texts of different subject matters covering both ancient and modern times at home and abroad are arranged for each unit. From the cultural perspective, these texts can help broaden students' cultural horizons and improve their perception and understanding of different cultures. In department compiled version of a complete set of primary school language teaching material, a total of eight texts reflecting ethnic minority cultures have been found in the Chinese textbooks compiled by the Ministry of Education for Primary schools, including “unforgettable water-sprinkling festival”, “the authors” and “under the big green tree of elementary school”, “the moon”, “Hebuli the hunter”, “the prairie”, “Tibetan opera” and poetry “ChiLeGe” (second grade), all of which presented a wide array of ethnic minority cultures from multiple perspectives.

Second, in the Chinese textbooks compiled by the Ministry of Education for Primary schools, “Language garden” which serves as an expansion of the texts, comes right after it. Language garden consists of numerous sections such as, “literacy gas station”, “over time”, “writing wizard”, “I love reading”, “communication platform”, “what I found”. According to our statistics, minority culture has been mentioned three times in the “Language Garden”. The article “Painting hometown” has been added to “I love reading” section of “Language Garden” in textbook for the second graders in which students were introduced to natural scenery of various regions such as grassland.

Thirdly, starting from textbook for third graders, an “exercises” section is added in each unit. Using cues offered, students are guided to contemplate on the content related to the writing theme and complete the writing exercises. Three exercises are found related to ethnic minority culture. They are as follows: In the “exercises” part of Unit 5 of Volume 1, Grade 4, excerpt of “Tianshan Mountain in July” is selected, it helps students to further understand the natural scenery of ethnic minority regions. “Exercises” in Unit 3 of Volume 1, Grade 5 requires students to write a summary of “Helibu the Hunter”. Students are expected to further deepen their understanding of the spiritual quality of minority characters.

The philosophy of comprehensive learning runs through the Chinese textbooks compiled by the Ministry of Education for Primary schools. A special section of “comprehensive learning” is set up to allow students to explore in groups a fixed theme by applying what they have learned. A subdivision “the Chinese traditional festival” created under “Comprehensive study” section in unit 3 in the textbook for the third graders requires students to choose a holiday and write about how the holiday is celebrated or impressive events that occurred during the celebration. This is supposed to help students understand holidays of different ethnic groups in different regions.

In addition, the “background illustrations” in textbooks are also one of the important ways to show the cultural elements of ethnic minority groups.

In the Chinese textbooks for primary schools compiled by the Ministry of Education, illustrations often appear along with the cultural content of ethnic minorities. For example, the two illustrations in the text “Grassland” respectively show the endless natural scenery and the humanistic landscape of riding horses.

It can be seen that the Chinese textbooks for primary schools compiled by the ministry of Education adopt a variety of mutually complementary ways to present ethnic minority culture, which deepen students' understandings and recognition of the contents of ethnic minority culture from multiple perspectives.

3. Thoughts and Suggestions on the Presentation of Ethnic Minority Cultural Elements in the Chinese Textbooks for Primary Schools Compiled by the Ministry of Education

The whole set of primary school Chinese textbooks compiled by the Ministry of Education has outstanding characteristics in the presentation of ethnic cultural elements, which are mainly reflected in the following aspects:

3.1 The Cultural Elements of Ethnic Minorities Are Rich and Diverse

According to the above analysis, the whole set of Chinese textbooks for primary schools compiled by the Ministry of Education cover rich and diverse ethnic cultural elements, such as names of geological locations and individuals, description of natural scenery in ethnic minority regions, and the introduction of ethnic dietary and clothing traditions; Minority folk etiquette, minority nationality art shows, an overview of education and economy in the minority regions. All of these reveal different aspects of ethnic minority culture, help us to understand and appreciate the unique charm of ethnic minority culture.

3.2 The Cultural Elements of Ethnic Minorities Are Presented in Flexible and Diversified Ways.

Ethnic cultural elements are not only introduced verbally, but also visually in the form of illustrations, which deepen our inner understanding and sensory experience. At the same time, “Chinese Garden”, “exercises”, “comprehensive learning” and other components of the textbook also complement with the “text” content, spark students' interest, guide students to gradually explore ethnic minority cultures.

The content of the textbooks are arranged in a step to step manner. For example, texts appearing in the junior stage such as “unforgettable water-sprinkling festival”, “under the big green tree of elementary school”, aim to allow students to understand ethnic minority culture more directly. And for senior students, texts such as “Hebuli the Hunter “, “the prairie” offer rational guidance for students to ponder on the characteristics that define each ethnic minority culture.

3.3 The Family-Alike Relationship between Ethnic Minorities and the Han People

Chinese textbooks compiled by the Ministry of Education for Primary schools not only demonstrate the cultural elements of ethnic minorities, but also are a perfect embodiment of the equal and united relationship between ethnic minorities and Han people. Appearing in the text “Elementary school Under the big green tree “, for example, is the description “primary school students of different ethnic groups study in the same classroom,” and in the “background illustration” students of different ethnic groups wearing traditional dresses studying under the same roof, both of which deepen the understanding of the grand picture of one nation consisting of multiple ethnic groups.

It's evident that Chinese textbooks compiled by the Ministry of Education for Primary schools show us the colorful minority cultures and its unique charms, they reflect the fusion of ethnic cultures in China, it is in consistency with Chinese government's policy of promoting equality, unity and common prosperity among all ethnic groups as well as the reality of the development of different ethnic groups^[4].

4. On the other hand, we believe that there are also some problems worthy of further consideration and discussion in the presentation of ethnic cultural elements in the Chinese textbooks compiled by the Ministry of Education for Primary schools.

4.1 Comprehensive Coverage of Ethnic Minority Culture

Out of the 55 ethnic minority groups in China, only one from the ancient time and eight from modern time have been mentioned. And the present of ethnic minority culture elements mainly concentrated on the Mongolian, Uygur, Dai, and Tibetan nationality, with other ethnic minority cultures being left out completely. Although the textbook needs to select representative contents of

ethnic minority cultures for arrangement, it is still possible to consider adding contents of different ethnic minority cultures in other teaching sections to give students more opportunities to contact and understand ethnic minority cultures.

4.2 Balance of Minority Culture Presence

Chinese textbooks compiled by the Ministry of Education for Primary schools consist of 12 volumes, in part ii of the textbooks for first graders, second graders and fifth graders, there's no contents related to ethnic minority culture at all. There has been an disproportional presence of ethnic minority contents in the six major parts of the textbooks. With the exception of the part "text" , only a small amount of ethnic culture elements scattered among the "project", "Chinese garden" and "comprehensive learning" sections. Such arrangement may affect the continuity and integrity of students' understanding and identification of minority cultures.

4.3 It is the Change of the Cultural Perspective of Ethnic Minorities

Throughout the whole set of Chinese textbooks for primary schools compiled by the ministry, there are almost no texts related to minority cultures written from the perspective of ethnic minorities themselves, but from the cultural perspective of Han people, except the Chile So except the Chile Song.

To writing, it also brings us a little regret, because of the ethnic people in the process of historical development, also created a large number of reflects its national style of outstanding literary works, if you can select which is suitable for primary school students works into teaching of reading and learning, not only conducive to enhance the minority students sense of national pride, but also to other ethnic students deepen for no Understanding and identification with minority cultures.

5. Conclusion

In short, the version of the elementary school language teaching material on the minority cultural elements present has distinctive features and advantages, in the teaching process, teachers can according to actual needs, based on the teaching material, in the multicultural concept under the guidance, timely, appropriate extension related content, further meet the demand of students for ethnic minority culture study, help them understand the excellent article all nationalities in our country To cultivate their broad vision and tolerant attitude towards different ethnic cultures.

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