



Cultural Content in Junior Middle School English Textbooks: A Comparative Study of China and Japan

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Abstract: This study presents a comparative analysis of cultural representation in junior middle school English textbooks from China (Go for it!) and Japan (NEW CROWN). Drawing on Cortazzi and Jin's tripartite framework of culture—local, international, and target—the research examines how cultural elements are embedded in word lists, illustrations, dialogues, and passages. The findings reveal clear contrasts between the two series: Go for it! emphasizes Chinese local culture and integrates target culture largely through modern pop references, while offering limited exposure to international culture. In contrast, NEW CROWN adopts a more balanced approach, presenting a wider range of local, international, and target cultural content, often reinforced through continuity across grades and multimodal presentation. These differences reflect broader educational orientations, with China prioritizing cultural identity and communicative practice, and Japan promoting intercultural awareness and global perspectives. The study argues that future textbook development in China would benefit from increasing the depth and diversity of international cultural content, while also pairing cultural passages with illustrative support to enhance comprehension. Overall, the research underscores the role of textbooks as vehicles for cultural transmission and calls for a more integrated approach to cultivating intercultural competence in English language education.

Keywords: cultural representation; English textbooks; comparative analysis; China; Japan

1. Introduction

Textbooks serve not only as tools for language learning but also as vehicles for cultural transmission, policy implementation, and educational reform (Apple, 1993; Doyle, 1989). Scholars emphasize that well-designed cultural content can broaden students' horizons and enhance intercultural competence (Byram & Risager, 1999; Xiang & Yenika-Agbaw, 2021; Yuen, 2011). Since the 1990s, Chinese educators have sought to move beyond grammar-based instruction by integrating cultural knowledge into textbooks to support cross-cultural communication (Pan & Zhu, 2022).

This study adopts Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) tripartite classification of culture—local, international, and target—as the framework for analysis. It examines how the two textbook series distribute and present cultural elements, and whether they emphasize students' native culture or foreign cultures. The comparison is particularly relevant because China and Japan both belong to Kachru's "expanding circle," where English plays an important role in education and international exchange but is not widely used in daily life (Kachru & Widdowson, 1985). Moreover, both countries share similar curriculum reforms, educational objectives, and exam-driven systems (Kitamura, Liu & Hong, 2022; Bray, Adamson & Mason, 2014).

This research pursues two primary objectives. First, it aims to examine which type of cultural content—local, target, or international—is most emphasized in the Chinese and Japanese textbooks. Second, it seeks to investigate the presentation strategies employed in these textbooks to disseminate cultural knowledge. To achieve these objectives, the study applies content, text, and corpus analysis to the selected materials.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Textbooks serve not only as tools for imparting linguistic and subject knowledge but also as important carriers of cultural content. They can preserve and transmit a nation's cultural heritage while simultaneously exposing students to diverse cultures around the world. Examining how cultural elements are presented in textbooks can therefore provide valuable insights for the future design and arrangement of cultural materials, enabling students to access such content more effectively. This section introduces definitions and classifications of culture relevant to textbook research and reviews several approaches for analyzing cultural representation, with the aim of identifying a method most appropriate for this study.

2.2 The Definition of Culture

The concept of culture has been defined from multiple perspectives. Taylor (1871), as cited by Guan (2011), described culture as a “complex whole” encompassing knowledge, belief, art, law, morality, customs, and other capabilities and habits acquired by individuals as members of society. This definition highlights culture as an integrated system composed of diverse elements.

Hu Wenzhong (1998) proposed a three-level classification: high culture (politics, law, philosophy, religion), popular culture (customs, habits, lifestyles, social behaviors), and deep culture (aesthetic values, cognitive patterns, problem-solving attitudes, and concepts tied to national spirit). This framework moves beyond surface phenomena to address the deeper essence of culture and its impact on individuals and society.

Cortazzi and Jin (1999), however, provide a classification particularly relevant to language education and cross-cultural research. They divide culture into local culture (the learner's own culture), target culture (cultures of English-speaking countries, e.g., the UK and the US), and international culture (global cultures regardless of language). This tripartite model enables clearer analysis of how textbooks represent culture across different geographic and linguistic contexts. For the purposes of this study, cultural content in Chinese textbooks will be analyzed as representing Chinese culture, while Japanese textbooks will be examined for Japanese culture, alongside target and international cultural elements. Given its focus on regional and linguistic distinctions, this classification is adopted in the present research.

2.3 Chinese Research on the Cultural Content of English Textbooks

In China, research on cultural content in English textbooks can be divided into two main strands: (1) analysis of a specific textbook series, and (2) comparative studies across different versions.

2.3.1 Studies on a specific set of English textbooks

Tonghui and Meixin (2022) applied qualitative methods to examine how cultural elements are integrated into high school English textbooks, aiming to enhance students' intercultural competence. Their study found that, although the reading texts in the compulsory module of the 2019 edition covered all nine cultural categories proposed by Byram's framework, the distribution was uneven. Social identity, belief, behavior, and national history were emphasized, while social interaction and political systems were underrepresented.

To illustrate these imbalances, the authors presented tables showing the frequency and proportion of local, target, and international cultural content across units. Their findings indicated that target culture (primarily English-speaking countries) dominated the textbooks, though recent editions showed a gradual increase in local and international cultural content. They recommended strengthening the representation of traditional Chinese culture to foster cultural confidence and suggested incorporating more diverse case studies from non-English-speaking countries.

2.5 Cultural Content of English Textbooks in Other Countries

Hino (1988) investigated the cultural components of Japanese English textbooks across 120 years, tracing their evolution from the Meiji Restoration to the post-World War II era. His findings show that textbook content closely reflected Japan's socio-political context. During the Meiji Restoration, English was introduced as a tool for international integration; during World War II, textbooks were censored to align with nationalist policies. When Anglo-American culture was promoted, textbooks highlighted Anglo-American values, whereas periods of cultural introspection emphasized traditional Japanese values.

Similarly, Patterson (2007) highlighted how politics shapes Japanese education, noting that while English textbooks are less overtly political than history or civics texts, they still carry ideological weight. He illustrated this with an example of a multiculturalism chapter that mainly presented English-speaking customs but concluded with a section on the Japanese tea ceremony—underscoring cultural pride within globalization.

Adamson (2001) examined curriculum development and found that newer English syllabi emphasized international cultural awareness, communicative competence, and technical quality, while blending Western teaching trends with Japan's traditional curriculum practices.

Beyond Japan, Teo and Zhu (2018) investigated how textbooks in China construct emotions and attitudes through both linguistic and visual resources. Their analysis revealed that positive emotions were used to cultivate favorable attitudes toward English learning and intercultural understanding. However, tensions emerged between promoting loyalty to local Chinese identity and encouraging a global outlook, between adopting Anglo-centric language models and recognizing local cultural practices. These findings underscore the complex role of textbooks in balancing national identity with global perspectives, offering insights for language educators, curriculum developers, and multimodality researchers.

Similarly, Shumin, Xiuying, Yuyi, and Xiaofeng (2021) analyzed the cultural elements in the reading sections of Chinese high school English textbooks. They found that these textbooks emphasized Chinese traditional culture, reflecting an effort to cultivate students' awareness of promoting native culture in English. However, the lack of comparative content between Chinese and foreign cultures limited opportunities for developing cross-cultural awareness. The authors argued that providing contrastive cultural materials would enable students to critically appreciate cultural similarities and differences, strengthen value judgments, and build cultural confidence. They also highlighted that the representation of objective cultural knowledge was insufficient, leaving gaps in how students understand the social and philosophical aspects of culture.

2.3.2 Comparative studies across different textbook versions

Fang and Ding (2020) compared English textbooks published by China's Yilin Publishing House and Japan's NEW CROWN Publishing House, noting that both countries share geographical and cultural similarities, but Japan has made significant advances in cultural education. Their content analysis revealed "cultural deficiencies" in Chinese textbooks. They recommended increasing the diversity of characters, enhancing the use of real images, enriching cultural concepts, and strengthening the presence of local culture.

Zhang (2014) compared the Chinese *Go for it!* series and Japan's *NEW CROWN* textbooks, concluding that Chinese textbooks emphasize systematic knowledge, phonetics, and strategy training, while Japanese textbooks focus on stimulating interest through engaging content and visuals but pay less attention to phonetic and grammatical instruction.

Similarly, Sun (2017) compared *Go for it!* and *NEW CROWN* with respect to international understanding education. The study found that Japanese textbooks organize content more systematically, while Chinese textbooks present it in a more scattered way. In terms of format, Japanese materials often use dialogues, whereas Chinese ones rely more on narrative passages. Despite these differences, both series generally foster positive attitudes toward international understanding.

3. Methodology

This research adopts a comparative analysis to examine the cultural content of junior middle school English textbooks from China (*Go for it!*) and Japan (*NEW CROWN*). The research investigates how cultural elements are represented in illustrations, dialogues, paragraphs, and word lists, with a focus on whether they prioritize native culture, target language culture, or other foreign cultures. The analysis seeks to evaluate the balance of these cultural representations and, based on the findings, proposes recommendations for improving the cultural content in future editions of Chinese textbooks. The study is grounded in both ontology, which frames textbooks as entities with cultural attributes, and epistemology, which positions textbooks as carriers of knowledge with inherent research value.

To achieve these objectives, the research employs three main qualitative methods: content analysis, text analysis, and discourse analysis. Illustrations are examined through text analysis to uncover the cultural symbols embedded in visual representations. Dialogue content is analyzed through discourse analysis, which highlights how language reflects cultural values, ideologies, and social practices. Paragraphs are approached with a combination of text and content analysis to capture both the underlying cultural meanings and the frequency of cultural themes. Word lists are studied through content analysis, enabling a systematic and quantitative examination of vocabulary choices that reflect cultural priorities. In all cases, cultural content is categorized into three groups: native culture, target culture, and other cultures, with results presented in comparative tables. While this desk-based study avoids the ethical and logistical complexities of fieldwork, it still faces challenges. The interpretive nature of qualitative analysis may introduce a degree of subjectivity, which will be minimized by considering multiple perspectives and prioritizing the most culturally explicit content. Additionally, the large volume of text and illustrations makes the process time-intensive, so core cultural elements will be prioritized to ensure efficiency. Despite these limitations, the integration of ontology and epistemology provides a solid philosophical foundation, while the use of complementary qualitative methods ensures a comprehensive and systematic analysis of cultural content in Chinese and Japanese textbooks.

4. Analysis

4.1 Analysis of Local, International, and Target Cultures in the Word Lists of *NEW CROWN* and *Go for it!*

Table 1 provides an overview of the total instances of local, international, and target culture found in the word lists of both editions of the textbooks. The data show that *NEW CROWN* contains a greater number of references to Local Culture and International Culture compared with *Go for it!*. In contrast, *Go for it!* includes only two more instances of Target Culture than *NEW CROWN*. This suggests that *NEW CROWN*, in comparison with *Go for it!*, places stronger emphasis on incorporating local and international cultural elements. One possible explanation is that *NEW CROWN* aims to help students develop a deeper understanding of Japan's cultural background as well as world cultures, thereby fostering a global perspective. By embedding a wider range of local and international cultural content, *NEW CROWN* seems to encourage intercultural communication skills and promote respect and appreciation for cultural diversity.

Table 1. Word Lists

	Local Culture	International Culture	Target Culture
<i>NEW CROWN</i>	36	54	39
<i>Go for it!</i>	22	46	41

On the other hand, *Go for it!* appears to concentrate more on Target Culture, referring to the cultural context of English-speaking countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom. This emphasis may reflect an intention to familiarize students with the cultural background of the target language, thereby enhancing their ability to apply English in real-life contexts. The textbook's approach suggests that acquiring a solid understanding of the target culture is viewed as a crucial component of language learning, supporting learners' adaptation and integration into English-speaking environments.

4.1.1 Analysis of Local Culture in the Word Lists of *NEW CROWN* and *Go for it!*

A total of 36 items related to local culture were identified in the word lists of *NEW CROWN*. These include references to Japanese food, sports, traditions, festivals, cartoons, transportation systems, and historical sites. In contrast, *Go for it!* contained 22 items reflecting Chinese local culture, covering domains such as media, country names, languages, festivals, geographical attractions, historical sites, literary works, characters, dynasties, sports organizations, and movies.

In terms of content emphasis, *NEW CROWN* demonstrates a particularly strong focus on festivals, with 17 vocabulary items related to Japanese traditional festivals. By comparison, *Go for it!* introduces only four words on Chinese traditional festivals, such as the *Dragon Boat Festival*, *Mid-Autumn Festival*, and the *Water Festival*. Moreover, *NEW CROWN* includes four terms connected to traditional Japanese activities or sports—*tea ceremony*, *Japanese Kundo*, *kendo*, and *judo*—all of which recur across the three volumes, suggesting both the pedagogical importance of these items and the textbook's emphasis on continuity. *Go for it!*, however, contains no vocabulary that directly reflects traditional Chinese activities or sports.

Pop culture is also treated differently: *NEW CROWN* features six items related to Japanese contemporary culture, such as *Captain Tsubasa*, *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure*, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Pokémon*, *Japan Expo*, and *Port Liner*. By contrast, *Go for it!* lists only one pop culture reference, *Kung Fu Panda*. At the same time, *Go for it!* incorporates more terms tied to Chinese history and geography, with nine references to significant sites and landmarks such as the *Yangtze River*, *Yellow River*, *Forbidden City*, and *Huangguoshu Waterfall*. *NEW CROWN* includes only two such references. Another distinction lies in frequency: while items in *Go for it!* generally appear only once, *NEW CROWN* tends to repeat key cultural terms across different grade levels, reinforcing cultural knowledge through repetition.

Taken together, these findings indicate that both textbooks incorporate local culture to support cultural awareness and identity formation. However, their emphases differ: *NEW CROWN* highlights festivals, traditional practices, and popular culture, while adopting a strategy of continuity and broad cultural coverage. *Go for it!* emphasizes historical and geographical elements, offering more in-depth but less frequently reinforced references to Chinese local culture.

4.1.2 Analysis of International Culture in the Word Lists of *NEW CROWN* and *Go for it!*

In the word lists, *NEW CROWN* presents three food-related items that embody international culture: French fries, Spaghetti, and Taco. In contrast, *Go for it!* does not include any internationally themed food vocabulary. Regarding world-famous individuals, *NEW CROWN* lists five (Albert Einstein, Gaudi, Leonardo da Vinci, Mozart, and Picasso), while *Go for it!* includes only one (Picasso). In the area of world literature, *NEW CROWN* introduces two works (Humpty Dumpty and The Little Prince), whereas *Go for it!* features three (Sleeping Beauty, Little Red Riding Hood, and Hansel and Gretel).

Both textbooks attach importance to language-related expressions. *NEW CROWN* contains six language names, while *Go for it!* includes five. A more distinct difference lies in the representation of geographical sites: *Go for it!* presents seven, compared to only two in *NEW CROWN*. Additionally, *Go for it!* contains one vocabulary item related to a world-famous event and one related to a movie title, neither of which appear in *NEW CROWN*.

In summary, *NEW CROWN* provides greater emphasis on international food, languages, and notable global figures, thereby offering more diverse cultural content aimed at promoting cultural exchange and broadening students' horizons. *Go for it!* highlights geographical attractions, fairy tales, and references to historical events, thereby cultivating students' global awareness through contextualized geographical and historical knowledge. This contrast may indicate differences in cultural education strategies: *NEW CROWN* prioritizes cultural understanding and communication, while *Go for it!* emphasizes geography- and history-based global knowledge.

4.1.3 Analysis of Target Culture in the Word Lists of *NEW CROWN* and *Go for it!*

In terms of target culture, *Go for it!* contains a greater number of country names (5) and literary works (8) than *NEW CROWN*. However, *NEW CROWN* surpasses *Go for it!* in the categories of landmarks, famous sites, and notable figures. Specifically, *NEW CROWN* lists ten landmarks or famous locations compared to eight in *Go for it!*. Furthermore, *NEW CROWN* presents twelve well-known individuals from the target language regions, while *Go for it!* includes only eight.

In other categories, *Go for it!* covers more terms (7) related to media, festivals, and organizations, whereas *NEW CROWN* includes only two. This difference reflects distinct emphases: *NEW CROWN* highlights classic culture and history, placing importance on landmarks, historical figures, and maintaining cultural balance between the United Kingdom and the United States. *Go for it!*, by contrast, emphasizes modern popular culture, entertainment, and broader international perspectives, while also including elements of historical and geographical knowledge to provide a more comprehensive cultural context.

Overall, *NEW CROWN* stresses the historical and cultural foundations of the target language countries, fostering cultural identity and historical awareness, while maintaining balance between British and American cultures. *Go for it!* appeals more to students' interests through modern pop culture and entertainment-related content, while also incorporating geography and history to enrich cultural understanding. These distinctions reveal the differing strategies and objectives of the two textbooks in students' cultural competence.

4.2 Analyze Local Culture, International Culture, and Target Culture Presented in *NEW CROWN* and *Go for it!* from the Illustrations

Table 2 summarizes the total number of local culture, international culture, and target culture elements found in the illustrations of the two textbook series. The results show that the representation of local culture in *Go for it!* far exceeds that of international and target culture. This emphasis suggests that the textbook's goal is to enhance students' sense of identity and pride in Chinese culture by embedding abundant cultural references into illustrations. Although *NEW CROWN* also pays attention to local culture, the number of items is comparatively smaller. Instead, *NEW CROWN* is richer in its presentation of international culture, introducing students to more diverse national and cultural content, likely with the aim of cultivating a global perspective and fostering cross-cultural understanding.

Table 2: Illustrations

	Local Culture	International Culture	Target Culture
NEW CROWN	17	21	17
Go for it!	21	5	13

While *Go for it!* focuses primarily on local culture with some integration of target culture, *NEW CROWN* leans toward a balance between international and target cultures. Both textbooks place strong emphasis on target culture, but *NEW CROWN* presents a slightly larger number of items related to English-speaking countries. These differences in emphasis reflect the distinct educational goals and cultural orientations of each textbook: *NEW CROWN* prioritizes cross-cultural integration, whereas *Go for it!* highlights local culture and national identity.

4.2.1 Local Culture Presented in the Illustrations of *NEW CROWN* and *Go for it!*

The number of illustrations featuring local culture in *Go for it!* (21) exceeds that in *NEW CROWN* (17). Moreover, *Go for it!* demonstrates broader cultural coverage, including ancient architecture, literary works, traditional festivals, food, handicrafts, music, animals, mythological stories, and prominent historical figures. In contrast, *NEW CROWN* focuses mainly on modern cultural icons (e.g., manga) and distinctive cultural symbols (e.g., kimono, judo, Mount Fuji).

In terms of ancient architecture, *Go for it!* (4) significantly surpasses *NEW CROWN* (1). It features iconic sites such as the Great Wall, the Terracotta Warriors, Tian'anmen, and the Forbidden City (Figure 1), which serve as both cultural heritage and symbols of historical continuity. *NEW CROWN* only includes temples. By highlighting these landmarks, *Go for it!* fosters students' historical awareness and pride in cultural heritage, reflecting China's strong emphasis on preserving and teaching historical traditions.

Literary works are another area where the two textbooks diverge. *NEW CROWN* does not present Japanese literary works in illustrations, whereas *Go for it!* includes Tang poetry and the story of Mulan. These selections not only showcase the richness of Chinese literature but also reinforce cultural values of heroism and tradition. The absence of literary representation in *NEW CROWN* may reflect different educational and cultural priorities in Japan.

In terms of festivals, *Go for it!* vividly depicts customs associated with traditional events such as the Spring Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, and Lantern Festival, providing cultural depth and historical context. *NEW CROWN*, in contrast, introduces traditional festivals in a more general way, possibly indicating a tendency to emphasize broader cultural overviews rather than detailed practices.

Modern culture is another point of distinction. *NEW CROWN* is stronger in representing contemporary culture, particularly through popular comics (Figure 2), which not only highlight achievements in Japanese pop culture but also showcase its global influence. *Go for it!* illustrates the CCTV logo (Figure 3), signaling the role of modern media in shaping cultural communication.

Overall, the comparison shows that *Go for it!* offers a wide-ranging presentation of cultural content, deeply rooted in history, literature, and tradition, while *NEW CROWN* emphasizes distinctive cultural symbols and excels in presenting modern pop culture. These differences highlight how each textbook reflects the cultural and educational priorities of its respective country.



Fig. 1. Local Culture Illustrations 1 (*Go for it!* and *NEW CROWN*)



Fig. 2. Local Culture Illustrations 2 (*Go for it!* and *NEW CROWN*)



Fig. 3. Local Culture Illustrations 3(*Go for it!* and *NEW CROWN*)

4.2.2 International Culture in the Illustrations of *NEW CROWN* and *Go for it!*

The textbook *Go for it!* contains only five illustrations related to international culture. From this observation, several implications can be drawn. First, the limited number of depictions of world cultures may restrict the development of students' global vision and international awareness. Johnson and Mayer (2009) demonstrated that illustrations enhance comprehension and memory; therefore, the absence of such representations reduces students' opportunities to engage with diverse cultures and hinders the cultivation of inclusiveness and intercultural sensitivity.

Second, the scarcity of international cultural illustrations may lessen students' interest and motivation to learn. Carney and Levin (2002) emphasized that visual elements contribute significantly to both learning outcomes and student engagement, while Glenberg et al. (2004) highlighted their role in stimulating interest through both real and imaginative experiences. Consequently, if *Go for it!* were to expand its use of culturally diverse illustrations, it could enhance students' enthusiasm for learning while also broadening their global outlook and strengthening their intercultural competence.

In contrast, *NEW CROWN* provides a richer and more varied portrayal of international culture. Its illustrations include national flags (Figure 4), modern architecture, traditional crafts, and natural landscapes (Figure 5), as well as cultural heritage and architectural icons from multiple countries (Figure 6). This diversity demonstrates a clear international orientation and reflects the educational objective of fostering global awareness. Such representations not only help students gain a more holistic understanding of cultural diversity but also support greater engagement in learning and the development of intercultural communication skills.

In summary, compared to *NEW CROWN*, *Go for it!* offers fewer and less comprehensive illustrations of international culture. Expanding these visual elements could play an important role in stimulating student motivation, broadening cultural horizons, and nurturing a global perspective.

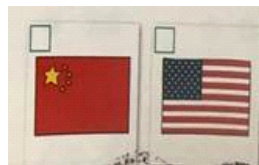


Fig. 4. International Culture Illustrations 1



Fig. 5. International Culture Illustrations 2

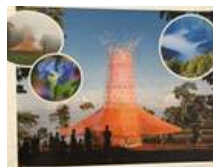


Fig. 6. International Culture Illustrations 3

4.2.3 Target Culture in the Illustrations of *NEW CROWN* and *Go for it!*

In *NEW CROWN*, there are 17 illustrations related to the culture of target-language countries. These focus particularly on American culture, including the national flag, the Statue of Liberty, the Lincoln Memorial, Martin Luther King Jr. (Figure 7), Rosa Parks, and Steve Jobs (Figure 8), which highlight the influence of the United States in multiple domains. Beyond this, the textbook emphasizes cultural diversity by presenting iconic buildings, influential figures, and cultural symbols from various countries, thereby fostering students' international perspectives and global awareness. The breadth and variety of illustrations not only capture students' attention but also stimulate curiosity about the target cultures, encouraging both learning motivation and exploratory spirit.

By contrast, *Go for it!* emphasizes modern culture and selected works of classic literature. Examples include references to the BBC, NBA, Dollar Tag, Mickey Mouse (Figure 9), Aaron Ralston, Martin Luther King, and the World Trade Center, as well as cultural icons of the United Kingdom and the United States such as Stonehenge and *Robinson Crusoe* (Figure 10). This focus on contemporary popular culture and literary heritage offers students insight into cultural phenomena and historical backgrounds in modern society, reflecting the enduring influence of Anglophone cultures.

NEW CROWN broadens students' global perspectives by integrating a wide range of cultural icons and historical figures, thus strengthening intercultural understanding, communication skills, and knowledge of cultural diversity. *Go for it!*, on the other hand, engages learners by drawing on modern pop culture and classic literature, which provides familiarity and relevance while still offering valuable cultural and historical knowledge. Each textbook presents its own strengths, and when considered together, they can provide students with a more comprehensive understanding of target cultures.



Fig. 7. Target Culture Illustrations 1

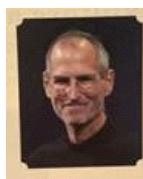


Fig. 8. Target Culture Illustrations 2



Fig. 9. Target Culture Illustrations 3



Fig. 10. Target Culture Illustrations 4

4.3 Analysis of Local, International, and Target Cultures in Dialogues of *NEW CROWN* and *Go for it!*

Table 3 presents the overall distribution of local, international, and target cultures within the dialogue sections of the two textbooks. The quantity of cultural elements embedded in dialogues is relatively limited—23 instances in *NEW CROWN* and 19 in *Go for it!*. This indicates that the primary aim of dialogue sections is to strengthen students' communicative competence, focusing on vocabulary use, sentence structures, and grammar. The design emphasizes practicality, enabling students to apply the language in everyday situations. Including excessive amounts of unfamiliar cultural content, particularly from international and target cultures, could impose additional cognitive demands on learners. Johnson and Mayer (2009) argue that effective multimedia learning requires balancing information input with learners' cognitive load, suggesting that too much cultural material could hinder language acquisition. Hence, the relatively small presence of cultural content in dialogues may be seen as a pedagogically reasonable choice, ensuring conciseness and clarity so that students can focus on language learning.

Table 3. Dialogues

	Local Culture	International Culture	Target Culture
NEW CROWN	14	4	5
Go for it!	10	1	8

4.3.1 Local Culture in the Dialogues of *NEW CROWN* and *Go for it!*

A closer examination reveals that *NEW CROWN* introduces Japanese local culture primarily through popular culture (anime, music), traditional festivals, folk arts (roti, Soran Bushi), and religion (shrines, ema plaques). For example, Figure 11 presents traditional Japanese culture (Rakugo) through a casual exchange between two students. By blending modern and traditional elements, the textbook highlights both the diversity and distinctiveness of Japanese culture, showcasing popular culture, traditional artistry, and spiritual practices.

By contrast, *Go for it!* incorporates Chinese local culture mainly through food culture (dishes, tea traditions), natural landscapes (e.g., Huangguoshu Waterfall, the Great Wall), mythology (Yugong Yishan), and related themes. In Figure 12, for instance, a dialogue between two students recounts their activities from the previous month, introducing Huangguoshu Waterfall not only by its geographical location but also by emphasizing its spectacular scenery. Such integration of familiar cultural elements into dialogues enriches the material while maintaining naturalness and relevance.

Educational psychology underscores that students' interest and engagement directly influence learning outcomes (Schiefele, 2009). By embedding well-known aspects of Chinese cuisine, landscapes, and folklore, *Go for it!* stimulates student motivation, encourages active participation in discussions and activities, and enhances learning effectiveness. At the same time, presenting familiar cultural symbols fosters a stronger sense of cultural identity and national pride. As Brown (2014) notes, highlighting traditional food, natural scenery, and stories enables students to appreciate and affirm their own cultural heritage.

In sum, both *NEW CROWN* and *Go for it!* successfully reflect the cultural uniqueness of Japan and China through carefully chosen local elements. Such cultural representations not only heighten student interest and classroom engagement but also reinforce cultural identity and pride.

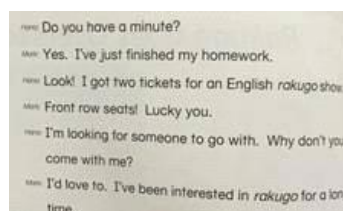


Fig. 11. Local Culture in Dialogues 1

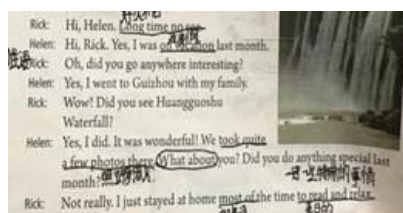


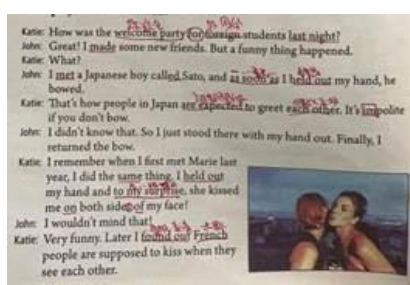
Fig. 12. Local Culture in Dialogues 2

4.3.2 Analyze International Culture Presented in the Dialogues of *NEW CROWN* and *Go for it!*

Both textbooks present only limited international culture in their dialogues. In *NEW CROWN*, international culture is reflected merely through isolated words such as “Sydney” or “Taco,” without further elaboration. In contrast, *Go for it!* includes a dialogue that introduces different greeting customs from around the world. This approach of embedding international culture within an authentic conversational context, as seen in *Go for it!*, may be more effective than the simple appearance of scattered words in *NEW CROWN*.

For instance, the dialogue in Figure 13 presents greeting practices from different countries in the context of a welcome party. This not only situates the culture in a meaningful language environment but also exposes learners to multiple customs simultaneously, thereby enriching the dialogue. When cultural elements appear only as isolated vocabulary, students may perceive them as mere words without associating them with any cultural significance. Conversely, presenting international culture through situational dialogues makes the learning experience more engaging and helps students clearly recognize cultural differences.

Byram (1997) highlights the importance of fostering students’ understanding of other cultures through interaction and dialogue, while Kramsch (1993) stresses the value of conveying cultural knowledge in concrete contexts. Thus, situational dialogues can support not only the acquisition of grammar and sentence patterns but also the development of intercultural awareness. Although the amount of international culture in *Go for it!* remains limited, its method of presentation is pedagogically valuable and could be expanded in future textbook design.

Fig. 13. International Culture in Dialogues (*Go for it!*)

4.3.3 Analyze Target Culture Presented in the Dialogues of *NEW CROWN* and *Go for it!*

With regard to target culture, *NEW CROWN* incorporates two American songs (“Stand by Me” and “The Colors,” Figure 14) as cultural input, along with a reference to the well-known British fairy tale *Peter Rabbit*. Similarly, *Go for it!* presents stories rooted in the target culture, including *Little Women* and *The Old Man and the Sea* (Figure 15). This study argues that such cultural materials can enhance students’ interest and motivation in language learning. Gardner (1985) underscores the importance of attitude and motivation in second language acquisition, noting that cultural resources can effectively foster learner engagement. Moreover, using authentic materials such as songs and stories provides learners with exposure to real language use and more natural forms of expression. Savignon (2002) also stresses the pedagogical value of authentic resources, as they help students develop a sense of genuine language context and expression.

Nevertheless, both textbooks tend to include cultural references only at the surface level, often limited to mentioning proper nouns within dialogues. For instance, as illustrated in Figure 15, a conversation between two students revolves around books they have read and their career aspirations, yet only the titles are cited without any elaboration on the content. As a result, learners may recognize the names of works but fail to grasp their deeper cultural significance.

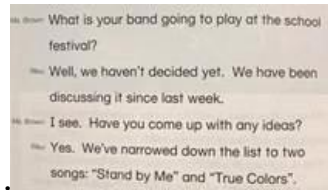


Fig. 14. Target Culture in Dialogues 1

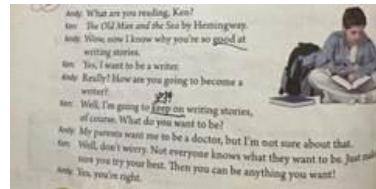


Fig. 15. Target Culture in Dialogues 2

4.4 Analyze Local Culture, International Culture, and Target Culture Presented in *NEW CROWN* and *Go for it!* through Paragraphs

Table 4 provides an overview of the total instances of local, international, and target culture found in the paragraphs of both textbooks. The data indicate that *NEW CROWN* (43) contains more cultural content in paragraph form than *Go for it!* (31). Across all three categories—local, international, and target culture—*NEW CROWN* demonstrates greater cultural representation. Nonetheless, both textbooks incorporate a relatively substantial amount of cultural information in their paragraphs. Since paragraphs allow for a more flexible word limit, they can convey cultural knowledge with greater clarity and detail, enabling students to gain a deeper understanding of the content.

Table 4. Paragraphs

	Local Culture	International Culture	Target Culture
NEW CROWN	18	12	13
Go for it!	13	6	12

4.4.1 Local Culture in the Paragraphs of *NEW CROWN* and *Go for it!*

Both textbooks place significant emphasis on presenting local culture within paragraphs, offering rich and varied content. In *NEW CROWN*, the materials highlight traditional festivals (e.g., the Green Festival, Fireworks Festival), traditional arts (e.g., shodō, nōki), food culture (e.g., sushi, steamed bread), historical events (e.g., Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum), and natural landmarks (e.g., Mount Fuji). In contrast, *Go for it!* introduces Chinese cultural elements such as festivals (e.g., Dragon Boat Festival), traditional foods (e.g., zongzi, longevity noodles, Yunnan rice noodles), classical literature and television works (*Mulan*, *Journey to the West*), traditional arts (e.g., paper-cutting, clay sculpture), as well as history and mythology (e.g., the legend of Chang'e's flight to the moon).

The modes of presentation also differ. *NEW CROWN* often integrates local culture into diaries, letters, news articles, emails, and short plays, creating a strong sense of narrative and context. For instance, as shown in Figure 16, a news-style article introduces the activities and experiences students can expect at the Green Festival. On the other hand, *Go for it!* conveys local culture through formats such as diaries, film reviews, TV reports, and dramas, emphasizing practicality and real-life applications. As illustrated in Figure 17, one paragraph explains the content of *Journey to the West* by describing it within a television program.

In summary, *NEW CROWN* highlights the diversity and distinctiveness of Japanese culture by combining elements of tradition with modern practices, whereas *Go for it!* emphasizes the depth and historical background of Chinese culture through the integration of both traditional and modern aspects.

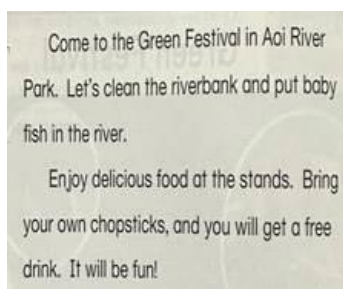


Fig. 16. Local Culture in Paragraphs

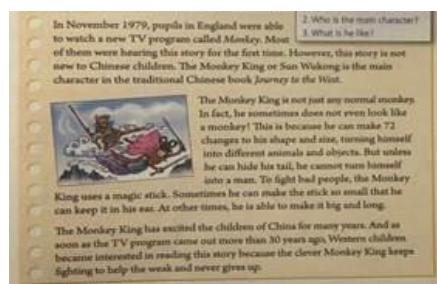


Fig. 17. Local Culture in Paragraphs

4.4.2 International Culture in the Paragraphs of *NEW CROWN* and *Go for it!*

In the presentation of international culture, *NEW CROWN* incorporates content such as traditional crafts from other countries (e.g., Chinese paper-cutting, Chinese tea culture) as well as major historical events (e.g., World War I). These cultural elements provide students with valuable exposure to the histories and traditions of other nations, thereby fostering an international perspective and a stronger global outlook. Moreover, the inclusion of diverse international cultural content within paragraphs helps to stimulate students' interest in reading while also enhancing their knowledge base of world cultures. For example, as illustrated in Figures 18 and 19, one paragraph introduces Sudan, one of the largest countries in North Africa, and depicts the struggles of children suffering from hunger and poverty.

By contrast, the treatment of international culture in *Go for it!* is relatively limited. Rather than highlighting significant historical events or in-depth cultural practices, its paragraphs tend to provide more general cultural comparisons. For instance, as shown in Figure 20, one passage contrasts the time planning and time management habits of students from Colombia and Switzerland through their personal accounts.

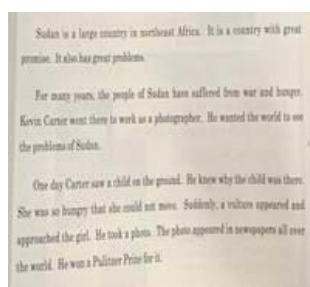


Fig. 18. International Culture in Paragraphs 1

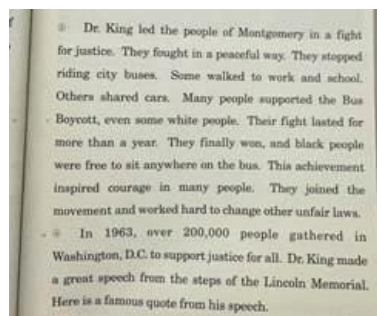


Fig. 22. Target Culture in Paragraphs 2

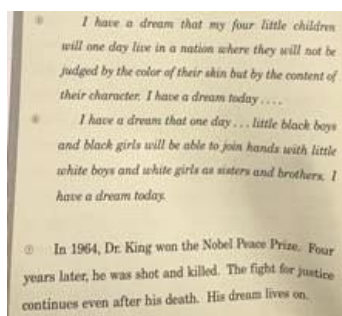


Fig. 23. Target Culture in Paragraphs 3

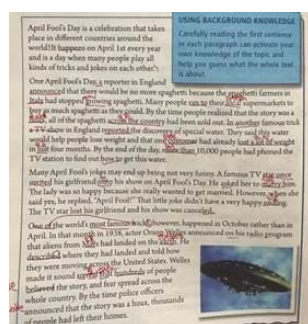


Fig. 24. Target Culture in Paragraphs 4

5.0 Discussion

This comparative study examined the cultural representations in the Chinese junior middle school English textbook *Go for it!* and the Japanese textbook *NEW CROWN*, focusing on word lists, illustrations, dialogues, and paragraphs. The analysis revealed that while both textbooks aim to integrate cultural content into English teaching, they differ in terms of scope, emphasis, and pedagogical strategy. These differences highlight how cultural design in textbooks reflects broader educational priorities and cultural orientations in China and Japan (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999).

With regard to local culture, *Go for it!* provides more diverse and detailed coverage of Chinese culture, including both traditional festivals such as the Mid-Autumn Festival and the Dragon Boat Festival and modern cultural icons such as the Chengdu Panda Base. Such integration supports students' national identity and cultural pride while simultaneously developing language competence (Zhang & He, 2012). In contrast, *NEW CROWN* focuses largely on traditional Japanese culture, such as kimono and sushi, but offers limited representation of modern culture, historical sites, and natural scenery. This narrower approach restricts opportunities for Japanese students to engage with their evolving cultural identity through English learning.

In terms of international culture, *NEW CROWN* includes more extensive and in-depth content. Its paragraphs introduce global crafts, histories, and events, enabling students to broaden their worldview and develop intercultural awareness. As Byram (1997) emphasizes, intercultural communicative competence requires learners to understand diverse perspectives, and *NEW CROWN*'s inclusion of detailed accounts of international culture

supports this aim. By contrast, *Go for it!* often limits international culture to isolated mentions in word lists, such as country names, without contextual elaboration. This reduces opportunities for Chinese students to engage with authentic international contexts, thereby weakening the potential to foster global outlooks. Both textbooks, however, give substantial attention to the target culture of English-speaking countries. *Go for it!* uses dialogues to contextualize cultural knowledge, which aligns with Kramsch's (1993) view that culture should be embedded in communication. *NEW CROWN*, on the other hand, relies more on illustrations to represent target culture, providing visual reinforcement that supports comprehension. Mayer's (2014) multimedia learning theory and Paivio's (1986) dual coding theory suggest that combining text and visuals enhances memory and understanding, which explains the effectiveness of *NEW CROWN*'s strategy. Together, these different approaches reflect pedagogical choices: *Go for it!* emphasizes communicative practice, whereas *NEW CROWN* foregrounds cultural illustration and narrative.

Overall, this study suggests that textbook development in both contexts can be improved by balancing local, international, and target culture more effectively. Following Gardner's (1985) work on motivation, incorporating diverse and engaging cultural content can stimulate learner curiosity and enhance learning outcomes. Moreover, integrating illustrations with textual content can strengthen comprehension and retention, as supported by Mayer (2014). Finally, aligning cultural design with Byram's (1997) model of intercultural competence can ensure that textbooks not only transmit language knowledge but also prepare students for effective participation in a globalized world.

6.0 Conclusion

This study shows that *Go for it!* and *NEW CROWN* reflect different cultural and pedagogical priorities in China and Japan. *Go for it!* emphasizes local culture and communicative practice, while *NEW CROWN* focuses on international culture and visual representation. Although both include elements of target culture, their differing strategies highlight the need for a more balanced integration of local, international, and global perspectives. Future textbook development should align cultural design with intercultural competence to better prepare students for participation in a globalized world.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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