

# Intercultural Communication Competence and Cultural Elements in Mandarin Tourism and Hospitality Textbooks for Non- Native Speakers

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## ABSTRACT

Improved air connectivity and China's new visa-free entry policy have significantly boosted tourism to Malaysia, with 1,185,050 Chinese visitors recorded in 2024. According to the Malaysian Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, this figure marks a 194% rise from the previous year. This dramatic rise demonstrates Malaysia's increasing need for tourism and hospitality workers with intercultural communication skills. For individuals working or preparing to work in hotel management and tourism, it is necessary to grasp the cultural distinctions between China and Malaysia, particularly the intricacies of local Chinese culture. In order to overcome this obstacle, Chinese language training resources that take into account both cultural viewpoints are essential. This study employs content analysis to examine the types and presence of cultural elements in two Mandarin textbooks developed for diploma-level students in tourism and hospitality. Guided by established frameworks of cultural elements (knowledge-based and communicative) and cultural types (source, target, international, and intercultural interaction), the study analyses how these aspects are embedded within the textbooks. The findings reveal a coexistence of both knowledge-based and communicative cultural content; however, the representation of cultural and intercultural elements remains unbalanced, as both textbooks predominantly emphasise local culture over international perspectives. These insights offer valuable reference points for future development of Chinese language materials tailored to the tourism and hospitality industries. In multicultural contexts, the effective integration of cultural and intercultural content is the key to enhancing learners' understanding of the language's cultural background and strengthening their intercultural communicative competence.

**Keywords:** Teaching Mandarin as a Foreign Language, Cultural Elements, Intercultural Communication Competence, Tourism and Hospitality Textbooks

## INTRODUCTION

Culture plays a vital role in foreign or second language (FL/L2) instruction and is no longer viewed as an optional or supplementary element to the core language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Brown, 2000; Kramsch, 1993). Since language functions as a form of social practice, culture forms the foundation of effective language teaching, requiring learners to develop cultural awareness to achieve true language proficiency (Kramsch, 1993). Cultural awareness, as Baker (2011) defines it, involves a conscious understanding of how culture influences both language learning and communication, while incorporating cultural instruction to enrich learners' overall language learning experience (Vernier et al., 2008). To foster

meaningful intercultural interaction, learners need to develop what Kumaravadivelu (2008) describes as global cultural consciousness, which enables them to engage effectively with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Consequently, language educators should carefully consider how cultural content is represented and taught in their classrooms. Given the close connection between language and culture, developing Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) has become essential in ESL and EFL contexts (Gholami Pasand & Ghasemis, 2018). Deardorff (2006) defines intercultural communicative competence (ICC) as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural contexts, drawing upon one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes. This perspective aligns with Wiseman (2002), who highlights the importance of motivation and understanding in facilitating intercultural communication. Since ICC is fundamentally concerned with the comprehension and negotiation of meaning across cultures, it exerts a significant influence on other dimensions of communicative competence, particularly linguistic competence (Brown, 1986). Consequently, ICC is often regarded as inseparable from language proficiency itself (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). Learners with high ICC demonstrate an awareness of cultural diversity and an ability to navigate differences between their native and target cultures with tolerance and understanding (Byram, 1997). The intercultural approach in foreign language education highlights the dual goal of fostering both linguistic proficiency and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), promoting learners' awareness of cultural differences that may influence communication between their own and the target culture (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1993). Cultural learning in this context extends beyond memorizing facts about a culture. It also encompasses understanding how culture shapes communication, behavior, and identity. Scholars differentiate between culture-specific learning, which entails acquiring knowledge and skills pertinent to a particular target culture, and culture-general learning, which encompasses transferable abilities such as cultural adaptation and effective cross-cultural interaction (Paige, 1997; Paige et al., 2003). Recent pedagogical perspectives advocate for higher-order cultural learning outcomes that cultivate critical thinking and intercultural reflection rather than static knowledge acquisition (Liddicoat, 2001). Since linguistic mastery alone does not guarantee intercultural competence, researchers emphasize the need for explicit integration of cultural learning in foreign language curricula (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Jin, 2013; Kramsch, 1993). Textbooks, as central resources in language instruction, play a vital role in shaping learners' linguistic and intercultural development. They serve as primary sources of both linguistic and cultural input (Ahour et al., 2014; Kobia, 2009; Nunan, 1988), influence learners' perceptions of the target culture, and provide structured guidance for teachers, especially in contexts with limited real-world exposure to native speakers (Roohani & Molana, 2013). In Teaching Chinese as a Foreign or Second Language (TCFL/TCSL), the importance of culture has been formally acknowledged. According to Hanban's (2014) International Curriculum for Chinese Language Education report, the overarching goal of TCSL is to develop learners' comprehensive language competence, which includes linguistic knowledge, language skills, strategic competence, and cultural competence. The latter involves cultural knowledge, cultural understanding, intercultural awareness, and international perspectives, all of which are crucial for enabling learners to use Mandarin appropriately in authentic intercultural settings. As Cortazzi and Jin (1999) observe, textbooks function as teachers, maps, and ideological guides that shape how both language and culture are presented. Thus, in the context of Mandarin tourism and hospitality education, textbooks must be designed not only to enhance linguistic proficiency but also to cultivate learners' ICC, ensuring their readiness to communicate effectively and appropriately across diverse cultural environments. In light of the growing need to equip Mandarin as a Foreign Language (MFL) learners in Malaysian higher education institutions (HEIs) with communicative competence suited to complex social environments, teaching materials, including textbooks and modules, must be designed to integrate both cultural and intercultural elements supported by effective pedagogical strategies. As the core instructional resource, textbooks provide the main linguistic input and shape how teachers deliver content (Cunningsworth, 1995, 2002; Tomlinson, 1998; Wu, 2010). Over the past two decades, MFL courses have expanded rapidly across Malaysian HEIs (Fan, 2011; Hoe, 2014; Yap, 2011), with all 20 public universities offering MFL as an elective and several institutions providing it as a minor program (Hoe, 2014; Yap, 2011). The subject is also taught in polytechnics, vocational colleges, and private universities, with growing enrolments among Malaysian non-native speakers, reaching 21,693 students in one semester across public universities in 2011 (Hoe, 2014). However, challenges remain in the cultural relevance of textbooks used. Many local HEIs rely on materials published in China (36.8%) or adapted from Chinese and local sources (26.4%) (Hoe, 2014). Studies highlight that Chinese-published MFL textbooks often lack systematic cultural and intercultural components (Wang, 2014; Deng, 2012; Zhou, 2004) and are designed for learners within the Chinese sociocultural context, making them less

suitable for foreign learners in Malaysia (Wang, 2016). Locally produced MFL textbooks also tend to focus primarily on linguistic skills, with limited integration of cultural knowledge (Tan, 2007). While Hoe (2016) found that some institutions included cultural content related to Chinese and local festivals or integrated cultural learning through assignments and co-curricular activities, detailed analysis of cultural and intercultural elements in MFL textbooks remains limited. These research gaps highlight the limited research on the inclusion of cultural and intercultural elements in locally published Mandarin as a Foreign Language (MFL) textbooks. Hence, this study aims to address the existing gap by examining how such elements are represented in selected textbooks and modules used in local higher education institutions through content analysis. Previous studies have provided initial insights into the integration of cultural components in Mandarin L2 materials and have identified shortcomings in their ability to foster intercultural understanding. However, there remains a lack of comprehensive investigation into how cultural elements reflecting the diversity of learners' backgrounds are incorporated. This study therefore seeks to enhance understanding of how cultural representation is conceptualized and implemented in L2 Mandarin textbooks designed for multicultural learning environments. In particular, MFL materials developed for Malaysian learners present a valuable context for exploring how textbook authors address the inclusion of culturally diverse perspectives and intercultural dimensions, which are essential for developing learners' intercultural communicative competence in the field of tourism and hospitality.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Cultural Elements in FL/L2 Teaching and Textbooks

A number of theoretical frameworks have been proposed to examine cultural elements in foreign or second language (FL/L2) education, among which the distinction between “Big C” and “small c” culture is particularly influential. Originating from the works of Chastain (1988), Paige et al. (1999), Pulverness (1995), and Tomalin and Stempleski (1993), this framework categorizes culture into two interrelated but distinct dimensions (as cited in Dehbozorgi et al., 2014). Big C Culture, or Culture with a capital “C,” encompasses the visible, formal, and institutional aspects of a target language community, such as literature, art, history, geography, architecture, education, and national festivals (Lee, 2009). In contrast, “small c” culture refers to the less tangible, everyday elements of cultural life, including values, beliefs, attitudes, social norms, interpersonal relationships, and behavioral conventions (Lee, 2009). Together, these two dimensions provide a holistic understanding of culture and have been central to curriculum design and intercultural training in foreign language education in Europe and North America (Chan et al., 2018). In a related discussion, Liddicoat (2001) distinguishes between two pedagogical perspectives, namely, the static and dynamic views of culture which are applied in language teaching. The static view treats culture as a collection of facts, artifacts, and national characteristics, focusing on surface-level information such as historical figures, geography, and social institutions. Conversely, the dynamic view conceives culture as a set of evolving practices embedded within linguistic and non-linguistic behavior, emphasizing how individuals use language in authentic cultural contexts. Expanding on this, Risager (1991) developed a framework for analyzing cultural content in foreign language textbooks through the micro and macro levels of culture. The micro level pertains to the sociocultural and anthropological aspects of daily life, such as personal attitudes, emotions, values, social interactions, and norms. Macro level, on the other hand, covers broader social, political, and historical dimensions. Risager and later scholars (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1993) emphasize that effective language textbooks should integrate intercultural issues and facilitate comparison between the target culture and the learner's own culture. Such comparisons, not only reduce stereotypes and potential misunderstandings, but also help learners view the target culture as less foreign, fostering mutual understanding (Byram & Planet, 2000; Liddicoat, 2001). Within this pedagogical paradigm, elements of “Big C” (achievement culture) and “small c” (behavior culture) correspond closely to Risager's macro and micro cultural levels. “Big C” culture represents the accomplishments of civilization such as art, literature, music, architecture, and philosophy while “small c” culture reflects everyday practices, customs, habits, dress, food, leisure, and belief systems that shape social identity and interaction (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993; Lussier, 2011). Collectively, these frameworks underscore the necessity for language educators and material developers to balance both dimensions in textbook design to cultivate learners' intercultural awareness and communicative competence. In the field of foreign and second language (FL/L2) education, Cortazzi and Jin (1999) systematically conceptualised how

culture is represented in instructional materials. They identified three primary types of cultural content that can be incorporated into textbooks: source culture, target culture, and international culture. The source culture refers to the learners' own culture, often aligned with the notion of national culture (Byram, 1997; Spencer-Oatey, 2012). However, in increasingly multicultural societies such as Malaysia, the United States, Japan, and the United Kingdom, the source culture comprises multiple cultural groups that coexist within a single nation. The target culture, by contrast, denotes the culture of the community where the target language functions as a first language, whereas the international culture includes references to cultures beyond both the learners' native and target contexts. For example, English textbooks may feature topics set in non-English-speaking countries, reflecting English's use as a global lingua franca. In the context of Mandarin as a Foreign Language (MFL) learning in Malaysia, the source culture encompasses Malaysian cultural practices across its diverse ethnic communities. The target culture, on the other hand, incorporates elements from both Malaysian-Chinese traditions and the broader Chinese culture of mainland China while the international culture extends to cultural information from countries other than Malaysia and China. Building upon Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) typology, Chao (2011) expanded the framework by introducing five categories of cultural information: source or local culture, target culture, international culture, intercultural interaction, and universality across cultures. The intercultural interaction category emphasizes learners' engagement in comparing, reflecting upon, and analyzing similarities and differences between the source, target, and international cultures through communicative and experiential activities such as role play, case studies, and problem-solving tasks. Such activities aim to foster learners' intercultural knowledge, positive attitudes, and communication skills (Chao, 2011). The fifth category, universality across cultures, pertains to culturally neutral content that is not specific to any one culture, aligning with the concept of cultural neutrality proposed by Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2014). For instance, a food-related dialogue in a textbook may serve communicative purposes without explicitly representing any specific cultural context. Both frameworks by Cortazzi and Jin (1999) and Chao (2011) provide valuable perspectives for analysing how culture is represented in language textbooks. They are especially useful in understanding how textbooks contribute to the development of intercultural communicative competence. Textbooks that include a variety of cultural types offer different pedagogical benefits. Those that focus on the source culture help strengthen learners' sense of identity and prepare them to communicate confidently about their own cultural backgrounds. Textbooks featuring target culture content promote learners' understanding of the language's sociocultural context and foster awareness of cultural diversity. Meanwhile, textbooks that integrate international culture enhance learners' global perspectives and intercultural skills by encouraging them to interact across cultural boundaries (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). Collectively, these approaches underscore the essential role of cultural information in FL/L2 textbooks, as the scope and balance of cultural representation significantly shape learners'. In the context of Mandarin tourism and hospitality education for non-native speakers, the incorporation of diverse cultural elements in textbooks becomes particularly critical. Learners in this domain not only require linguistic proficiency but also the ability to navigate complex intercultural interactions with tourists, colleagues, and stakeholders from varied cultural backgrounds. Applying the frameworks of Cortazzi and Jin (1999) and Chao (2011), Mandarin textbooks can be analyzed in terms of how they present source, target, and international cultures, as well as opportunities for intercultural interaction and universality across cultures. For Malaysian learners of Mandarin, source culture content may include examples of communication strategies and cultural norms relevant to Malaysia's multiethnic society, while target culture content could reflect linguistic and sociocultural practices of Chinese-speaking communities in China. International culture elements may introduce learners to global tourism contexts and intercultural scenarios beyond Chinese and Malaysian cultures, helping them develop adaptable intercultural skills. Additionally, the integration of intercultural interaction activities, such as role plays, case studies, or problem-solving exercises, allows learners to critically compare cultures, reflect on their own cultural assumptions, and cultivate the attitudes and skills necessary for effective intercultural communication. Therefore, the careful design of Mandarin tourism and hospitality textbooks that balance these cultural dimensions can significantly enhance learners' intercultural communicative competence, preparing them to function successfully in multicultural professional environments. Cultural content in foreign language (FL) and Mandarin as a Foreign Language (MFL) teaching has been conceptualized from a functional perspective into two main categories: knowledge-culture and communicative-culture (Zhang, 1990). Knowledge-culture refers to cultural knowledge that does not directly influence the accuracy or effectiveness of communication, encompassing aspects such as literature, art, history, geography, beliefs, and values of a particular society. In contrast, communicative-culture encompasses linguistic and non-linguistic elements that directly affect

communication between speakers of different cultural backgrounds. A lack of familiarity with these elements may result in miscommunication or misunderstanding. For example, understanding the order of Chinese surnames and given names is crucial for accurate communication, as the surname precedes the given name in Chinese, unlike in English or Malay (Zhang, 1990; Stern, 1983). Chen (1992, 1997) further refined the concept of communicative-culture into three dimensions: language structure, semantics, and pragmatics. Cultural elements in language structure are reflected in the grammatical arrangement of vocabulary, phrases, and sentences, conveying social values and cultural characteristics such as collectivism, hierarchy, and respect for ancestors. For instance, the Chinese appellation “Lǐ xiǎojiě 李小姐” (Miss Li) places the surname first, highlighting the cultural significance of family over the individual, a structure differing from English and Malay norms (Ding, 2010; Shen, 2004). Cultural elements in semantics are embedded in lexis, idioms, proverbs, and metaphors, carrying culturally specific meanings that may not have direct equivalents in other languages. Examples include words such as “lóng 龙” (dragon), symbolizing power and success, and “xǐjiǔ 喜酒” (wedding dinner), where the meaning is deeply rooted in Chinese traditions (Chen, 1992; Liu, 2002; Shi, 2009). Pragmatic elements of communicative-culture relate to social conventions and interpersonal behaviors, including greetings, leave-taking, expressions of appreciation, apologies, and taboos (Chen, 1992; Shi, 2009). For instance, casual greetings among acquaintances, such as “Shàng nǎr? 上哪儿?” (Where are you going?), are intended to show concern rather than intrude on privacy, while expressions of modesty like “Nàlǐ nàlǐ 哪里哪里” (there is nothing to be proud of) reflect cultural norms in responding to compliments. Similarly, gift-giving etiquette demonstrates the influence of cultural norms on communicative practices, where initial refusal followed by acceptance reflects politeness and respect (Liu, 2002; Ding, 2010). Overall, the integration of both knowledge-culture and communicative-culture is essential in MFL pedagogy to foster accurate and culturally informed language use, thereby enhancing learners’ intercultural competence and minimizing communication breakdowns. Intercultural competence is increasingly recognized as a critical goal in foreign language (FL) and second language (L2) teaching. Fantini (2009) defines it as a complex set of abilities required to communicate effectively and appropriately with people who are linguistically and culturally different. Byram’s (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence emphasizes that learners must develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness to perform successfully in intercultural interactions. Textbooks, as key instructional materials, play a central role in shaping learners’ intercultural competence by embedding cultural content that exposes students to both familiar and unfamiliar cultural contexts. Scholars have proposed several frameworks for categorizing cultural content in FL/L2 textbooks. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) identified three primary types: source culture (SC), target culture (TC), and international culture (IC). Source culture refers to the learners’ own culture, often equated with national culture, though it may encompass multiple cultural groups within a country (Byram, 1997; Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Target culture pertains to the culture of the country where the target language is natively spoken, whereas international culture encompasses cultures outside the learners’ home culture or the target culture, often used in topics such as travel or global issues. For example, in the context of Malaysian learners of Mandarin, source culture includes Malaysian society and its diverse ethnic groups; target culture refers to Chinese culture in China and among Malaysian Chinese communities; and international culture includes cultures from countries beyond Malaysia and China. Chao (2011) extended this framework by including intercultural interaction (ICI) and universality across cultures (UC). ICI focuses on comparison and reflection activities that enhance learners’ awareness of cultural similarities and differences, while UC includes content that is culturally neutral, such as general topics like food or daily routines, which are not tied to any specific culture. These frameworks highlight that textbooks not only transmit cultural knowledge but also scaffold learners’ development of intercultural awareness and skills (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; Chao, 2011). Textbooks reflecting diverse cultural perspectives offer different benefits: source culture reinforces learners’ identity, target culture develops awareness of other cultures, and international culture enhances intercultural skills (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). From a functional perspective, cultural content in MFL and Mandarin as a Foreign Language (MFL) has been categorized into knowledge-culture and communicative-culture (Zhang, 1990). Knowledge-culture refers to background cultural knowledge, including literature, art, history, geography, and beliefs, which does not directly affect the accuracy of communication. In contrast, communicative-culture comprises linguistic and non-linguistic elements that directly influence the effectiveness and accuracy of communication. Chen (1992, 1997) further divided communicative-culture into three dimensions: language structure, semantics, and pragmatics. Cultural elements in language structure are reflected in vocabulary, phrase, and sentence formation, embodying social values and traditions, such as the

precedence of the surname in Chinese appellations, e.g., “Lǐ xiǎojiě 李小姐” (Miss Li), highlighting respect for family hierarchy (Ding, 2010; Shen, 2004). Semantic elements are evident in vocabulary, idioms, and metaphors that carry culturally specific meanings, such as “lóng 龙” (dragon) symbolizing power, success, and auspiciousness, or “xǐjiǔ 喜酒” (wedding dinner) representing traditional customs (Chen, 1992; Liu, 2002; Shi, 2009). Pragmatic elements involve social conventions and interpersonal behaviors, including greetings, leave-taking, expressions of appreciation, and gift-giving, where culturally appropriate usage ensures politeness and avoids miscommunication (Liu, 2002; Ding, 2010). The distinction between knowledge-culture and communicative-culture aligns with broader conceptualizations of culture in FL/L2 teaching, such as the Big ‘C’ and small ‘c’ framework. Big ‘C’ culture represents visible aspects of a society, including history, arts, festivals, and education, while small ‘c’ culture refers to hidden norms, values, beliefs, and social practices (Chastain, 1988; Paige et al., 1999; Pulverness, 1995; Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993, as cited in Dehbozorgi et al., 2014). Integrating these frameworks into Mandarin teaching highlights the dual role of textbooks: they provide learners with knowledge about the world and equip them with the communicative competence necessary for culturally appropriate interaction. By attending to both knowledge-culture and communicative-culture, learners can navigate linguistic and social nuances effectively, minimizing misunderstandings and fostering intercultural competence (Zhang, 1990; Chen, 1992, 1997; Chan et al., 2018). Hence, this study aimed to investigate culture elements represented in Tourism and Hospitality Mandarin Textbooks for non-native learners that were written by local authors in Malaysia. The research questions addressed in this study are: (1) What cultural elements (knowledge culture or communicative culture) and types of culture (source, target, international cultures or intercultural interaction) are presented in the selected textbooks?; (2) To what extent are these categories of cultural elements and types of culture depicted in the textbooks?

## METHODOLOGY

### Content Analysis

Content analysis, a widely used research method for examining cultural representations in foreign language (FL) textbooks, involves systematic procedures to draw meaningful inferences from textual data (Weber, 1990; Sándorová, 2014). In this study, a qualitative approach to content analysis was adopted to explore and interpret the cultural elements embedded in the textbooks. An analytical framework was developed by integrating categories and types of culture drawn from previous studies. These cultural categories were then identified and quantified through frequency and percentage analysis to reveal their distribution across the dataset. As a form of latent content analysis, this approach emphasized deeper, interpretive insights into the meaning of texts within their specific cultural contexts (Dörnyei, 2007). According to scholars such as DeWitt et al. (2013) and Mayring (2000), content analysis enables researchers to systematically examine, interpret, and verify textual data to better understand complex issues. Krippendorff (2013) further highlights its value in generating new perspectives and informing practical applications. The current research incorporated a directed content analysis strategy, using prior theories and research to guide the development of coding categories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This method involved both qualitative interpretation and quantitative description, reflecting best practices in content analysis which combine both approaches for more comprehensive findings (Weber, 1990; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

### Sample

Three Tourism and Hospitality Mandarin Textbooks were purposively sampled for this study. These two textbooks are popular specific purpose textbooks currently use at local universities in Malaysia. Mandarin Textbook for Tourism and Hotel Management 1 华语课本旅游和酒店管理科专用 (一) coded as MT1 and Mandarin Textbook for Tourism and Hotel Management 2 华语课本旅游和酒店管理科专用 (二), coded as MT2, both were published by Xueer Publisher. Comprehensive Mandarin for Hotel and Tourism Management 1 酒店与旅游管理 华语综合课本 (一), coded as MT3, published by UiTM Press. The Hotel and Tourism Management Mandarin textbooks are written for students in the tourism and hospitality fields who need to develop Mandarin language skills relevant to customer service, hotel operations, travel services, and cross-cultural communication within the industry. These textbooks are also suitable for professionals who need to use in industry-specific context.

## Defining the categories

Table 1 Cultural Elements in Textbooks

| Code                                | Sub-categories                                                                        | Interpretation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Themes or examples                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Knowledge Culture (Zhang, 1990)     | Big C culture (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993) (Kramsh, 2013).                            | was coded using synonymous terms like "classics" for literature and "governmental bodies" for institutions.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | literature, education, institutions, geography, history, art, and economy                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|                                     | Small c culture (Byram, 1993) (Risager, 1991)                                         | "norms" for values and "nonverbal cues" for body language.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | everyday practices and social norms, values, beliefs, attitudes, everyday living, interpersonal relations, body language, living conditions, social conventions, and ritual behavior                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Communicative Culture (Zhang, 1990; | A<br>i. Cultural elements in language structure<br>(Chen 1992, Liu, 2002; Xia, 2013), | Cultural elements that are embodied in the structure of vocabulary, phrases and sentences. (Ang, 2020)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Form of names, dates, and times, greetings in Chinese. (Ang, 2020)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|                                     | ii. Cultural elements in meaning (Chen, 1992; Liu, 2002; Xia, 2013).                  | Cultural elements that are contained in lexis and idioms. (Ang, 2020)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Family kinship titles in Chinese                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                                     | iii. Cultural elements in pragmatics (Chen, 1992; Shi, 2009; Xia, 2013).              | refers to the language used in cultural protocol, social context, custom, and interpersonal relationships                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Linguistic taboos of a particular country                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|                                     | B.<br>Intercultural Elements (Byram, 1997; Paige et al., 2003)                        | Exploration in target culture and learner's own culture towards the development of intercultural knowledge, skills, attitudes and awareness through activities and tasks, such as discussion on comparison of the similarities and differences between target culture and learners' own culture, intercultural problem-solving tasks, etc. | Comparison of the differences or similarities between two cultures, such as comparison on formal greetings, non-verbal behaviors in greetings, appellations in greetings, address forms, kinship titles, Chinese name and student's own name, gift- giving etiquette, family values, connotation of numbers, traditional festivals, cuisine, etc. Discussion or problem solving of intercultural issues which causes stereotypes or misunderstanding, such as greetings behavior between different cultures. Interactive tasks which involve target culture and students' own culture. |

Table 2 Types of Culture in Textbooks

| Categories of culture (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; Chao, 2011) | Description                                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Source Culture (SC)                                      | It provides information about Malaysian society, including the cultures of its various ethnic communities.                                                            |
| Target Culture (TC)                                      | It pertains to both Malaysian Chinese culture and the traditional culture of China.                                                                                   |
| International Culture (IC)                               | it includes all cultures except Malaysian culture and the Chinese culture of China.                                                                                   |
| Intercultural Interaction (ICI)                          | It pertains to the comparison, and critical reflection on the similarities and differences between the local (source) culture and the international (target) culture. |

## Coding Procedure

Before commencing the coding process, it is essential to define the units of analysis (Cohen et al., 2007). The content analysis procedure began with identifying these units (Cavanagh, 1997; McCain, 1988). Based on the study's research questions, the unit of analysis could comprise a letter, word, sentence, section of text, number of participants in a discussion, or duration of interaction (Elo et al., 2014). In this study, words, phrases, and sentences within dialogues and texts served as the evaluation units for Communicative-Culture. For Little c and Big C culture elements, the entire dialogues or texts within each chapter were analyzed. Each chapter in every textbook was treated as one analytical unit, resulting in a total of 18 units. A categorization matrix was designed to code the data according to predefined categories (see Tables 1 and 2). All data were systematically examined and coded to determine their correspondence with or representation of the identified categories (Polit & Beck, 2004). For each unit of analysis, the coder assessed the presence of each category, marking it accordingly. Descriptive statistics were then computed to capture the frequency or occurrence of each category. Following the quantitative analysis, qualitative interpretation was conducted to explore the nature of cultural representations, supported by specific examples from the texts.

Upon completion of the coding process, the frequency data related to cultural elements and types of culture were exported from the software for quantitative analysis. This was subsequently followed by a qualitative interpretation of the data, wherein specific instances of cultural representation within the textbooks were examined and discussed in detail. The trustworthiness of a qualitative study is vital for assessing its value, and this research adheres to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four key criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Trustworthiness is reflected in the accuracy of data reporting, data collection methods, analytical reliability, and representation of diverse realities (Elo et al., 2014). In terms of credibility, the sample—four L2 Mandarin textbooks written by Malaysian authors for elementary learners in Malaysian public universities—was clearly defined, with the learner population being ethnically diverse. Dependability is ensured as the textbooks are stable, publicly available print materials, with full bibliographic details provided to support future research. Confirmability was strengthened through the development of a categorization matrix based on previous literature, and through a coding process conducted by the lead researcher. To verify coding consistency, 10% of the data was re-coded by two trained postgraduate students, one of whom had cultural familiarity, resulting in over 90% agreement. Transferability, which aligns with external validity, is demonstrated by the study's relevance to similar educational contexts, offering valuable insights for future research on Mandarin for specific purpose textbooks for Malaysian or other multicultural learners.

## Findings

The findings related to the two research questions are presented in this section. The two cultural dimensions were analyzed across three Mandarin for specific purposes textbooks, designated as MT1, MT2 and MT3. Each textbook was developed for use over the course of a single academic semester. Collectively, the textbooks comprised 18 units, encompassing a range of thematic content, including tour agency, hotel, local

tourist attraction sites, local foods, travel to China, airport and asking for direction. Based on the analysis of all 18 units (refer to the appendix for comprehensive evidence), the findings are summarized in Table 3. With regard to cultural elements, knowledge-culture does not directly impact communicative accuracy between individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds—is explicitly featured across all three textbooks (see Table 3). This type of culture is present in nearly all units of MT1, MT2, and MT3, though its occurrence is comparatively lower in MT2. Furthermore, Big 'C' culture emerges as the predominant focus throughout the textbooks, whereas small 'c' culture receives limited representation. Communicative culture is also evident across all four textbooks. Communicative culture elements related to language structure, semantics, and pragmatics are incorporated in MT1, MT2 and MT3.

Table 3 Percentage of Cultural Elements and Types of Culture in Sampled Textbooks

| Sample | Total units | Cultural elements |                 |                  | Type of culture  |                |                |                 |
|--------|-------------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|
|        |             | Kc (%)            |                 | Cc(%)            | SC (%)           | TC (%)         | IC (%)         | ICI (%)         |
|        |             | Big'C'            | Small'c'        | Cc-i             |                  |                |                |                 |
| MT 1   | 6           | 66.6%<br>(4/6)    | 83.33%<br>(5/6) | 66.6%<br>(4/6)   | 100%<br>(6/6)    | 16.6%<br>(1/6) | 50%<br>(3/6)   | 16.6%<br>(1/6)  |
| MT 2   | 6           | 66.6%<br>(4/6)    | 0%<br>(0/6)     | 50%<br>(3/6)     | 66.6%<br>(4/6)   | 0%<br>(0/6)    | 66.6%<br>(4/6) | 33.3%<br>(2/6)  |
| MT 3   | 6           | 66.6%<br>(4/6)    | 50%<br>(3/6)    | 66.6%<br>(4/6)   | 100%<br>(6/6)    | 33.3%<br>(2/6) | 33.3%<br>(2/6) | 16.6%<br>(1/6)  |
| Total  | 18          | 66.6%<br>(12/18)  | 44.4%<br>(8/18) | 61.1%<br>(11/18) | 88.8%<br>(16/18) | 16.6%<br>(3/6) | 50%<br>(9/18)  | 22.2%<br>(4/18) |

Percentage (%) is for the the total chapters in the sampled textbooks.

In term of types of culture, source culture is the most dominant compared to target culture, international culture and intercultural interaction, as it present in almost all 18 chapters across all three textbooks (see Table 3). It is followed by international culture, which accounts for 38.8% less than source culture. Intercultural communication is only integrated into one to four unit in MT1, MT2 and MT3, and target culture has the most under-represented as cannot be found in MT2. Table 4 to 6 show the analysis of categories of culture and specific examples illustrating these categories in individual textbooks.

In MT1, source, target and international cultures are represented by elements of knowledge culture (see Table 4). For source culture, it seems that multi-racial culture is depicted, making reference to local tourist attractions or places at different states of Malaysia such as Melaka, Kuala Lumpur, Pahang, East Coast, as well as buildings built during colonial times and modern era, religious worship buildings of different ethnics, and local cultural heritage. There are also elements representing the target culture, for instance the use of Chinese characters in dialogues, the culture of Baba and Nyonya (hybrid of local Malay culture and Chinese culture). Futhermore, International culture is represented by making reference to the tourist attractions or places in the world modern cities for example Hong Kong and Taipei. Meanwhile in small 'c' culture, elements were represented by social identities and local cuisines in source culture. Target culture was represented by local Chinese cuisines, whereas international culture was represented in the aspect of etiquette when enquiring information, and intercultural communication was depicted through the difference of the material used to make Chinese leather puppet and local leather puppet.

Elements of communicative-culture that are embedded in language structure, semantics and pragmatics are used mainly to represent the target culture in MT1, for instance, a brief description of local Chinese and China tourist, form of Chinese names, politeness in providing service and welcoming guests expression. On the other hand, Source culture and international culture were represented by the introduction and form of local name, and introduction and form of western name respectively.

Table 4 Cultural Elements and Types of Culture in MT1

| Type of culture | Knowledge culture (Kc)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                   | Communicative culture (CC)                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                 | Big 'C'                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Small 'c'                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                               |
| SC              | Geography: local tourist attractions of Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Pahang, Melaka, East Coast, pictures of tourist attractions. (C1)<br>Arts and history: The architecture of buildings built during colonial period and modern time. (C4&C5)<br>The religious worship buildings of different ethnics. (C4)<br>Local cultural heritage. (C5) | -Social identities in Malaysia(C4)<br>-different variety of local cuisine(C6)                     | -Description of local tourists.<br>-Form of local names.                                                                                                      |
| TC              | -Using Chinese characters in dialogues (C1-6)<br>-Culture of Baba and Nyonya (mixture of Chinese and local Malays)(C5)                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | -Local Chinese cuisine(C6)                                                                        | -Introduction of local Chinese and China tourist.<br>-Form of Chinese names.<br>- Politeness in providing service.(C2 &C3)<br>- Express welcoming guests.(C1) |
| IC              | Geography: Hong Kong tourist attractions, pictures of tourist attraction sites, picture of the highest skyscraper in Taiwan, Taipei 101, picture of China visa. (C1)                                                                                                                                                                    | -Etiquette when enquiring information.(C2 &C3)                                                    | -Introduction of Western tourist.<br>-Form of Western name. (C3)                                                                                              |
| ICI             | /                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | -The difference of the material used to make Chinese leather puppet and local leather puppet.(C5) |                                                                                                                                                               |

Percentage (%) is for the the total chapters in the sampled textbooks.

In MT2, target culture receives attention, with source, international, and intercultural cultures represented through knowledge- or communicative-culture (see Table 5). Knowledge-culture is mainly Big 'C' elements and found in source, target, international cultures and intercultural interaction. Meanwhile Small 'C' element is only found in target culture. For source culture, it seems that multi-racial culture and history of Chinese immigrated to Malaya are also depicted through making reference to two states located in Borneo Island which are Sabah and Sarawak with the local famous tourist attractions or places. There are also elements representing the target culture, for instance the use of Chinese characters in dialogues and the famous places in the province of China such as Beijing, Nanjing, Shanghai and Hangzhou. Moreover, International culture is represented by making reference to the foreign currency exchange while travelling to overseas. Intercultural interaction is represented by the different exchange rate of Renminbi and US Dollar which indicated he US Dollar(USD) has long been the dominant global currency in the world, in contrast, the Chinese renminbi (CNY) has been gradually increasing its presence in global markets. Meanwhile in small 'c' culture elements were represented by the appropriate etiquette when enquiring information at the hotel counter. The elements of communicative-culture is represented via the source culture in MT2, for instance, a brief description of local Chinese and China tourist and form of Chinese names.

In the target culture, form of Chinese names, expression of welcoming guests and politeness in asking direction are presented according to the chapter in the textbook. The International culture is represented by procedure check in at the airport counter, baggage check in and security check at airport and check in at the immigration counter of an airport in chapters respectively.

Table 5 Cultural Elements and Types of Culture in TMC2

| Type of culture | Knowledge culture(Kc)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                | Communicative culture(Cc)                                                                                                                                            |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                 | <b>Big C</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>Small c</b>                                 |                                                                                                                                                                      |
| SC              | Geography: local tourist attractions of East Malaysia such as Sabah and Sarawak. (C2)<br>pictures of tourist attractions in East Malaysia (C2)<br>Historical buildings: Kuching Chinese History Museum (C1)                                            | /                                              | -Form of local names.<br>- Description of local tourists.                                                                                                            |
| TC              | - Using Chinese characters in dialogues (C1-6)<br>-Travel to China: Tourist attraction in big cities of China such as Shanghai, Beijing, Hangzhou and Nanjing. (C5&C6)<br>Pictures of tourist attraction sites in Beijing, Shanghai and Hangzhou. (C6) | -Etiquette when enquiring information.(C3 &C4) | -Form of Chinese names.<br>-Express welcoming guests. (C1&C4)<br>-Politeness in asking direction.(C1)                                                                |
| IC              | - Foreign currency exchange. (C5)                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | /                                              | -procedure check in at the airport counter.(C3)<br>-baggage check in and security check at airport. (C3)<br>-check in at the immigration counter of an airport. (C3) |
| ICI             | -Different exchange rate of Renminbi and US Dollar.(C5)                                                                                                                                                                                                | /                                              | /                                                                                                                                                                    |

Percentage (%) is for the the total chapters in the sampled textbooks.

Finally, similar to MT1 and MT2, source and target cultures are dominant in MT3 (see Table 6). In the source culture, elements of Big “C” culture are represented through geography, including local tourist attractions and images of these destinations, as well as arts and history, reflected in colonial-era architecture found in states such as Penang and Malacca. The presence of religious buildings belonging to different ethnic groups and depictions of local cultural heritage further emphasize Malaysia’s multicultural identity. On the other hand, Small “c” cultural elements of the source culture are portrayed through etiquette when staying in hotels, social identities within Malaysia, and the diversity of local cuisines. In the target culture, Big “C” elements include the use of Chinese characters in dialogues and the heritage of Baba and Nyonya culture, which combines Malay and Chinese traditions. Meanwhile, Small “c” elements are expressed through etiquette in making inquiries and interactions, highlighting aspects of communication and behavior within the cultural context. Communicative culture is reflected through various linguistic and social expressions, including the use of both local and Chinese name forms, which represent cultural identity and diversity. Additionally, politeness in providing services highlights the importance of respectful and courteous interaction within social and professional settings. The expression of welcoming guests further emphasizes hospitality and warmth, showcasing cultural values related to kindness and respect in interpersonal communication.

Table 6 Cultural Elements and Types of Culture in TMC3

| Type of culture | Knowledge culture(Kc)                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                | Communicative culture(Cc) |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
|                 | <b>Big C</b>                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>Small c</b>                                                                                 |                           |
| SC              | Geography: local tourist attractions, pictures of tourist attractions. (C1&C4)<br>Arts and history: The architecture of buildings built during colonial period especially in Penang and Malacca state. | -Etiquette while staying in hotel.<br>-Social identities in Malaysia(C4)<br>-different variety | -Form of local names.     |

|     |                                                                                                                                         |                                                |                                                                                                             |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|     | (C4&C5)<br>The religious worship buildings of different ethnics. (C4)<br>-Pictures of buildings. (C4)<br>-Local cultural heritage. (C5) | of local cuisine(C6)                           |                                                                                                             |
| TC  | -Using Chinese characters in dialogues (C1-6)<br>-Heritage of Malay and Chinese culture, Baba and Nyonya.(C4)                           | -Etiquette when enquiring information.(C3 &C4) | -Form of Chinese names.<br>- Politeness in providing service.(C2 &C3)<br>- Express welcoming guests.(C1&C5) |
| IC  | /                                                                                                                                       | /                                              | /                                                                                                           |
| ICI | /                                                                                                                                       | /                                              | /                                                                                                           |

Percentage (%) is for the the total chapters in the sampled textbooks.

## DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The analysis of the three Mandarin for Specific Purposes (MSP) textbooks - MT1, MT2, and MT3 - indicates that while cultural content is incorporated throughout the materials, the overall representation of cultural elements lacks balance and depth. The textbooks collectively prioritize knowledge-culture, focusing primarily on factual and descriptive aspects such as tourist attractions, historical landmarks, and local heritage. These Big “C” or macro-cultural elements are useful for introducing learners to general information about Chinese and Malaysian culture but do not sufficiently promote intercultural communication competence. The limited inclusion of Small “c” culture—micro-level elements such as daily routines, customs, social interactions, and values—suggests that learners may not gain the pragmatic and sociocultural knowledge necessary for authentic communication in tourism and hospitality contexts. This imbalance aligns with prior studies (Kramsch, 2013; Lussier, 2011; Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993), which emphasize the need for both macro and micro cultural representation to achieve comprehensive intercultural learning outcomes.

Furthermore, the textbooks examined demonstrate a dominant presence of source culture, particularly Malaysian cultural elements, while target and international cultures remain underrepresented. The emphasis on local cultural identities and locations such as Melaka, Penang, and Kuala Lumpur reflects the national context of textbook production but may unintentionally limit learners’ exposure to the communicative norms of the target culture. The findings show that elements of the target culture—such as Chinese etiquette, kinship terms, and symbolic meanings of numbers—are either superficially presented or entirely absent in some textbooks. This imbalance may hinder learners’ ability to engage meaningfully with native speakers of Mandarin, particularly in professional or cross-cultural service encounters. To address this, textbook developers should integrate culturally rich topics such as dining etiquette, non-verbal behavior, values of filial piety and modesty, and gift-giving customs to help learners internalize the social and behavioral conventions of Chinese communication.

The study also reveals that while communicative-culture elements (Chen, 1992) such as pragmatics, politeness strategies, and speech acts are present, they are often implicitly embedded without clear explanation or contextual elaboration. When cultural meanings in language structure and semantics are not made explicit, learners may overlook key cultural nuances or interpret them through the lens of their own culture, leading to potential misunderstandings. This finding supports Byram (1997) and Deardorff (2006), who assert that culture and intercultural elements must be explicitly addressed in the curriculum to foster awareness and prevent stereotyping. It is therefore recommended that textbook writers include explicit notes, cultural explanations, and reflection prompts accompanying dialogues and reading passages. Such additions would strengthen learners’ understanding of the link between linguistic expression and cultural meaning, enhancing their intercultural communicative competence (ICC).

In terms of intercultural representation, the analysis shows that intercultural communication is minimally featured, appearing in only a few units across the textbooks and rarely supported by reflective or comparative tasks. Intercultural elements such as cultural comparisons, problem-solving activities, and role-plays are

essential to help learners develop awareness of differences and similarities between Chinese culture and their own. Without these activities, learners risk perceiving the target culture as static or distant. Incorporating tasks that prompt students to contrast forms of address, dining etiquette, and non-verbal behaviors between cultures would encourage them to critically reflect on cultural diversity and develop adaptive communication strategies (Byram, 1997; Risager, 1991; Paige et al., 2003). Interactive, scenario-based learning, particularly relevant to the tourism and hospitality domain could further strengthen learners' ability to manage real-world intercultural encounters.

Moreover, the low degree of international culture representation across the textbooks highlights an additional gap. References to other global destinations such as Hong Kong and Taipei are present but remain descriptive rather than comparative or analytical. In today's globalized tourism and hospitality industry, learners must engage with international visitors from multiple cultural backgrounds, not solely local or Chinese contexts. Including examples of intercultural communication scenarios involving Western tourists, as well as materials on global hospitality practices, would enable learners to apply Mandarin communicatively in multicultural settings. Such inclusion would also align textbook design with global intercultural frameworks that emphasize knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness as core components of ICC (Deardorff, 2006; Liddicoat, 2001).

In light of these findings, it is recommended that future Mandarin textbook development adopt a more balanced and systematic integration of Big "C" and Small "c" cultural elements, communicative-culture, and intercultural components. The inclusion of explicit cultural information—such as short reading passages on Chinese arts, festivals, and traditions—combined with practical communicative activities, would bridge linguistic learning and intercultural understanding. Teachers also play a critical role in contextualizing cultural elements through guided discussions and cross-cultural comparisons. Ultimately, the enhancement of intercultural communication competence requires textbooks and instruction to move beyond linguistic accuracy toward fostering intercultural awareness, empathy, and adaptability—skills essential for effective communication in Mandarin within the tourism and hospitality industries.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis of the three Mandarin Tourism and Hospitality textbooks (MT1, MT2, and MT3) reveals that while cultural elements are incorporated, their representation remains imbalanced and lacks depth in fostering Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). The materials predominantly emphasize Big "C" knowledge-culture and local source culture, with limited attention to Small "c" practices, target culture, and intercultural interaction. Consequently, learners may develop linguistic skills without acquiring the sociocultural awareness and pragmatic sensitivity needed for authentic communication in diverse contexts. To bridge this gap, future textbook design should integrate explicit and balanced cultural content by integrating knowledge, communicative, and intercultural elements. The addition of reflective, task-based activities can further strengthen and support these elements. By doing so, Mandarin education for non-native speakers can more effectively prepare learners to engage competently, appropriately, and empathetically in the multicultural tourism and hospitality industry.

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