
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Cultural Reflections in English Literature for Young Learners: A Comparative Study of Chinese and Foreign Students' Texts

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| ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the reflection of cultural aspects in English literary writings created by Chinese and international undergraduate students under a common educational framework in China. Utilizing Sociocultural Theory, the results indicate that students' narratives are not simply language expressions but culturally mediated constructions of meaning, influenced by internalized values, social experiences, and culturally specific narrative conventions. The study uncovered three key patterns. First, Chinese students' writing generally focused on clear moral precepts and socially acceptable practices, which is what they were supposed to do. Foreign students' stories, on the other hand, were more likely to use experience and implicit reflection to convey meaning. This meant that readers had to figure out what the events meant instead of being told directly what they meant. Second, Chinese students often built stories around relational and collective frameworks that emphasized family, friends, and social harmony. On the other hand, international students tended to focus on individual agency and choosing their own choices. Third, the stories written by Chinese students were mostly based on real-life situations and social settings. On the other hand, the stories written by international students were more likely to be innovative and creative, even when they were given the same writing challenge. These findings together affirm that, even in controlled environments, learners from diverse cultural origins utilize unique sociocultural resources in narrative construction. The study thus corroborates the perspective that language acquisition, especially within literary frameworks, is profoundly connected to culture. It is crucial to note that the observed variations should not be construed as hierarchical or evaluative; instead, they should be regarded as varied narrative orientations influenced by culturally mediated perceptions of the world. This study enhances the literature by offering a comparative, context-sensitive analysis of international literary expression, concentrating on English literature students within a unified academic setting. It shows how cultural identity still affects how people make meaning, even when they are using the same language and learning environment.

| KEYWORDS

Cultural Reflections; English Literature; Young Learners; Comparative Study; Chinese and Foreign Students' Texts

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Over several years, studies have shown that young learners' books are a great way for language, creativity, and culture to come together. Besides helping young learners learn to read and write, it also serves as a way to teach them about culture by passing on values, social standards, and ways of thinking about their own identity. In second language contexts, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, students' literary writing serves as a particularly valuable medium for analyzing how learners navigate verbal expression in conjunction with culturally ingrained cognitive frameworks. Kramsch (2020) contends that language acquisition is inherently linked to cultural meaning-making, as learners utilize their sociocultural experiences to build narratives in the target language. Recent academic discourse has increasingly underscored that literacy practices, especially

children's storytelling, are socially contextualized rather than solely cognitive phenomena. Bonny Norton (2021) emphasizes that language learners engage their identities in literacy activities, influencing the ways they portray themselves and their environments through writing. Likewise, research on children's narrative production indicates that storytelling embodies culturally particular schemas, encompassing moral reasoning, social interactions, and worldviews (Duff, 2019). These results indicate that children's English literary writings need not to be seen as neutral language outputs, but rather as culturally mediated constructions of meaning. In the Chinese educational system, cultural impacts on children's writing are very pronounced. Traditional ideals based on Confucian philosophy, like collectivism, filial piety, and moral didacticism, still affect how teachers teach and how students tell stories (Chen, 2023). Studies indicate that Chinese learners frequently integrate moral lessons, social harmony, and deference to authority in their written narratives, mirroring overarching cultural norms regarding acceptable conduct and social obligation. Conversely, children from Western or other foreign educational contexts typically demonstrate narrative patterns marked by human agency, inventiveness, and imaginative exploration, frequently prioritizing personal experience over direct moral instruction (Ryan & Louie, 2013). There is a significant void in the literature concerning comparative qualitative evaluations of children's English literary texts in shared educational contexts, despite increasing interest in the intercultural aspects of language learning. The majority of current research concentrates on adult learners, quantitative evaluations of writing proficiency, or specific cultural groupings. There has been insufficient examination of how Chinese and international students—studying English in the same institutional context—create literary pieces that embody contrasting cultural perspectives. This gap is crucial as it neglects the importance of immediate intercultural contact circumstances, when diverse cultural narrative traditions coexist and may have mutual influence. Moreover, although prior research has investigated cross-cultural variations in writing styles, there is a paucity of studies that analyze these disparities within the context of children's literature production, when imagination, moral reasoning, and identity formation concurrently influence the process. Children's literature is intrinsically linked to cognitive development and cultural socialization, providing a distinctive chance to examine how young learners assimilate and articulate cultural values through language. In this regard, the current study aims to investigate the reflection of cultural characteristics in English literary pieces authored by Chinese and international students within a Chinese EFL setting. Through qualitative thematic analysis, the study seeks to identify trends in story topics, character development, and moral posture, so enhancing the comprehension of how culture influences children's literary expression. This work ultimately addresses the demand for more sophisticated, context-aware research on international literacy practices and offers insights pertinent to both language instruction and children's literary studies:

2. Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate and contrast the cultural representations seen in English literary texts authored by Chinese and international students in a Chinese EFL setting. The study aims to analyze how learners from diverse cultural backgrounds create meaning through narrative, focusing on subject selections, character development, and moral positioning.

Based on a qualitative interpretative method, the study seeks to reveal the reflection, negotiation, and expression of cultural values in children's storytelling practices. Instead of concentrating on grammatical accuracy or ability, the study regards children's literary texts as culturally mediated artifacts, through which learners express socially informed perceptions of themselves, relationships, and the world.

The study is conducted with the subsequent objectives: to ascertain the prevailing cultural themes in English literary works created by Chinese and international students; examine how the two groups' stories are told and how the characters are shown in different ways; investigate the impact of cultural origins on moral framing, social ties, and manifestations of agency in children's storytelling; and examine how students' writings mirror overarching sociocultural norms and identity frameworks within a communal educational setting.

The study seeks to enhance the comprehension of intercultural literacy practices in English language acquisition, especially in environments where many ethnic groups coexist in a single classroom. The results are anticipated to enhance culturally responsive instructional methods, prompting educators to acknowledge and incorporate students' varied narrative traditions into English literary training.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which says that social interaction and cultural environment are the main things that determine learning and meaning-making. A key feature of this theory is the assumption that cognitive development doesn't happen on its own. Instead, it happens through language, cultural instruments, and taking part in activities that are organized by society.

In this context, language transcends basic communication; it serves as a fundamental cultural instrument through which individuals formulate and convey meaning. Vygotsky (1978) posits that advanced cognitive abilities emerge through the internalization of socially shared practices, indicating that children's written texts are significantly shaped by their cultural contexts.

In the realm of second language acquisition, this indicates that learners do not merely acquire linguistic structures; they also incorporate culturally ingrained cognitive frameworks, values, and interpretations into their language usage.

Sociocultural Theory offers a framework for comprehending how narratives serve as exterior manifestations of internalized cultural knowledge in children's literary works. When kids write stories in English, they use culturally mediated schemas that have been influenced by their families, schools, and society as a whole. These schemas include things like moral beliefs, social ties, and expectations about how to act. Lantolf, Thorne, and Poehner (2015) assert that language creation in second language contexts is inextricably linked to the sociocultural factors around learners, affecting both the content and form of their expressions.

In China, where Confucian traditions have historically shaped educational practices by stressing social harmony, respect for authority, and moral development, children's narratives may embody these values through themes of filial responsibility, collective well-being, and ethical conduct. Conversely, international students—who may originate from educational systems that emphasize individual expression and creativity—are prone to formulate narratives that highlight personal agency, imagination, and self-directed action. Sociocultural Theory posits that these disparities are not merely individual variations but rather results of culturally driven cognitive processes.

The theory also emphasizes the classroom as a space for cultural engagement, where students encounter various narrative frameworks and discursive methodologies. In these contexts, children's literary texts can be regarded as manifestations of their indigenous cultural origins and the novel cultural influences assimilated through the process of English language acquisition. This viewpoint is especially pertinent to the current research, which investigates Chinese and international students in a common educational environment, facilitating the examination of cultural continuity and possible intercultural effect in their writing.

Consequently, Sociocultural Theory offers a cohesive framework for examining how children's English literary texts include culturally influenced modes of meaning-making. This study's main idea is that storytelling is not just a language exercise, but a culturally based activity through which kids build, share, and show how they see the social environment.

4. Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative comparative research approach to analyze the reflection of cultural values in English literary writings created by Chinese and international students within a common educational framework. A qualitative methodology was considered suitable as the study aims to elucidate patterns of meaning, cultural representations, and narrative structures within students' works, rather than to assess linguistic proficiency or determine statistical correlations.

The study utilized thematic analysis as the principal analytical method, adhering to the reflexive approach delineated by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke. Thematic analysis is especially appropriate for this study as it facilitates the systematic discovery, analysis, and interpretation of repeating patterns (themes) within qualitative data, while also being adaptable to culturally specific interpretations. The research design is comparative and interpretive, concentrating on the identification of both similarities and variations in narrative patterns between two groups: Chinese and international students. The study's unit of analysis is the children's English literary text, regarded as a culturally mediated artifact that embodies learners' internalized sociocultural experiences.

To maintain uniformity and comparability across participants, all students received an identical writing prompt: "Compose a brief English narrative regarding a significant experience, lesson, or challenge (real or fictitious)." This method let participants be creative while still following a common theme. This reduced the amount of variation in the tasks and made it easier to analyze how culture affects the way stories are told.

There were six steps in the analytical process that happened over and over again:

1. Data Familiarization: We read all of the texts we collected several times to get a better understanding of their content, story flow, and deeper meanings.
2. Initial Coding: Texts were rigorously coded to find relevant units that have to do with cultural expression, such as moral pronouncements, relational dynamics, expressions of agency, and imaginative aspects.
3. Theme Development: Codes were organized into larger groups to create possible themes that show cultural trends that happen over and over in the dataset.
4. Comparative Analysis: Themes were analyzed between the two groups (Chinese and international students) to discern similarities and differences in narrative building and cultural representation.
5. Theme Refinement: The themes were looked over, improved, and made more clear to make sure they were consistent and different from each other.
6. Interpretation and Reporting: The concluding themes were analyzed via the lens of Sociocultural Theory, connecting textual patterns to culturally influenced methods of meaning-making.

To improve the analysis's reliability and thoroughness, the study used a number of qualitative validation methods. To start, dense description was used to give detailed explanations of the story's topic. Second, systematic coding techniques made sure that patterns were found in all of the texts in the same way. Third, comparing groups made perceptions more believable by showing how themes were spread out differently amongst Chinese and international students.

Overall, the research methodology enables a detailed examination of how children's English literary writing functions as a medium for cultural reflection and meaning-making, offering insights into the interaction between language acquisition and

sociocultural

context.

5. Population and Sampling Technique

The study's participants were undergraduate students studying English Literature at a university in China. The participants comprised both Chinese students and international (foreign) students, all engaged in the same academic context and subjected to analogous literary teaching, critical methodologies, and writing conventions. This study specifically concentrated on English literature students, as they exhibit not only advanced ability in English but also training in narrative structure, thematic development, and literary expression. This guarantees that the texts generated are adequately developed for qualitative literary analysis and are able to convey profound cultural significances. In addition, the shared academic setting created a controlled space for intercultural comparison, reducing variances in instructional exposure and making it easier to link differences in narrative patterns to cultural background rather than differences in teaching style.

This study utilized a purposive sample method to identify people capable of supplying information-rich textual data pertinent to the research aims. Purposive sampling is suitable for qualitative studies that emphasize depth of understanding rather than statistical generalization. Participants were chosen based on the following criteria: enrollment in an English Literature program or course; proficiency in producing coherent English literary pieces; and representation of both Chinese and foreign cultural backgrounds. The researchers collected and looked at 30 English literary writings. These included 15 authored by Chinese undergraduate students and 15 produced by international undergraduate students. The foreign student group consisted of individuals from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, all engaged in studies under the same institutional framework in China. This balanced composition enabled a methodical examination of culturally affected narrative patterns within a common academic and instructional setting.

The students' written narratives were the principal unit of analysis in this study. All participants responded to the same writing prompt, ensuring that each work addressed a roughly similar thematic domain—namely, personal or imagined experiences including lessons, obstacles, or noteworthy events. All 30 pieces contributed to the overall thematic analysis; however, a subset of six sample texts (three from each group) was chosen for thorough qualitative illustration. These texts were selected according to: clarity of the story framework; cultural influence; and its correlation with the initial generated codes.

Selected Chinese Students' Texts

1. "A Lesson from My Father" (CS2): A story that makes you think about how important it is for parents to guide, punish, and help their children grow morally.
2. "The Value of Honesty" (CS8): A story about making moral choices that emphasizes honesty and social responsibility.
3. "Learning Through Friendship" (CS13): A story about getting along with others, working together, and being social.

These texts show how moral contemplation, relational orientation, and socially based meaning-making happen over and over again.

Selected Foreign Students' Texts

1. "Breaking My Limits" (FS3): A story that focuses on how people may grow, be strong, and be determined to get through hard times.
2. "A World Beyond Reality" (FS9): A story that uses fantasy and creative investigation to portray the prompt.
3. "Choosing My Own Path" (FS14): A story that makes one think about independence and making one's own choices.

These writings show themes of personal agency, creative engagement, and self-expression.

6. Ethical Consideration

This study followed the ethical rules that have been set for research that involves people. Before collecting data, all participants gave their informed consent and were fully aware of the study's goal, the nature of their involvement, and their right to withdraw at any moment without consequence. The study used coded IDs (such CS1 and FS1) to safeguard the identity of all participants and keep their information private. No personally identifiable information was included in the study. The gathered texts were utilized exclusively for scholarly study objectives. Also, participation was completely voluntary, and no one was forced to do anything. All data were securely managed and maintained in compliance with institutional research protocols to safeguard the privacy and protection of participants.

7. Discussion of Findings

The examination of students' English literary texts indicates that, despite a common writing challenge, participants generated tales that embody unique culturally influenced patterns of meaning-making. Based on Sociocultural Theory, these results indicate that learners' storytelling practices are influenced by internalized cultural schemas, which affect the expression of experiences, values, and identities through language. The data revealed three principal themes: (1) moral didacticism contrasted

with experience narration, (2) relational orientation opposed to individual agency, and (3) realism juxtaposed with imaginative extension.

7.1 Moral Didacticism versus Experiential Narration

One major difference between the two groups is how they framed stories in terms of moral meaning. The Chinese students' writing generally showed a clear moral point of view, and they often ended with clear teachings. One participant, for example, wrote:

"From this experience, I learned that we must always respect our parents and be responsible in life" (CS2). Another student also stressed the importance of ethical reflection: *"Honesty is the most important thing, because people can't trust you without it"* (CS8).

These samples demonstrate a trend wherein storytelling functions as a medium for moral education and value reinforcement, rather than merely narrative expression. This is in line with other studies that show that Chinese students commonly write with didactic and socially oriented ideals, which are based on moral education and social responsibility in Chinese culture (Chen, 2023; Ryan & Louie, 2013). From a sociocultural standpoint, these patterns might be understood as manifestations of internalized cultural norms, wherein narrative production is influenced by enduring educational and familial expectations. Lev Vygotsky (1978) posits that advanced cognitive processes, such as the construction of meaning in language, are facilitated by social interaction and cultural environment. The clear moral endings in these texts are not just a matter of style; they show a culturally based grasp of what stories are supposed to do.

The texts written by international students, on the other hand, tended to focus on experience and personal thought without being too moralistic. For instance:

"I didn't know if I would succeed, but I kept trying, and that made me stronger" (FS3).

Someone else said:

"It wasn't about winning; it was about finding out what I could do" (FS14).

Here, meaning is communicated implicitly via experience and human development, rather than through direct moral assertions. This corroborates the findings of Norton (2021), who contends that learners' narratives frequently embody their identity investments and personal meaning-making processes. The lack of a moral resolution does not signify an absence of values; instead, it illustrates an alternative storytelling convention that encourages readers to derive meaning.

7.2 Relational Orientation versus Individual Agency

A second major difference came up in how people see themselves in relation to others. Chinese students' stories often put the main character in a web of social connections, especially with family and friends. For instance:

"With the help of my friends, I was able to get through the hard times, and we became closer" (CS13).

In a different situation:

"My father's advice helped me figure out what to do, and I did what he said" (CS2).

These examples illustrate a relationally embedded self-concept, wherein actions and consequences are intricately linked to interpersonal relationships and societal positions. These findings align with research emphasizing the significance of collectivist tendencies in shaping story structures, especially in situations affected by Confucian principles (Chen, 2023).

Sociocultural Theory posits that this relational orientation illustrates how individuals acquire socially constructed meanings and expectations. As a result, narratives are not formed as solitary personal stories but as representations of socially placed identities.

On the other hand, literature written by foreign students more often stressed individual agency and freedom. For instance:

"I chose to confront my fear independently, despite the challenges" (FS3).

One more person wrote:

"No one could choose for me, so I made my own decision and accepted the result" (FS14).

These stories put the person at the center of action and decision-making. This trend is consistent with earlier studies indicating that learners from Western or other non-collectivist backgrounds frequently prioritize personal autonomy and self-direction in their narratives (Ryan & Louie, 2013).

This disparity should not be seen as a strict cultural divide; instead, it should be understood as a variation in narrative focus. Both groups exhibit agency and relational awareness; however, the varying significance of these features illustrates culturally influenced methods of structuring experience.

7.3 Realism versus Imaginative Expansion

The third theme focuses on how different the stories are in terms of how much imagination they use. The texts written by Chinese children were mostly based on real-life situations and believable stories, usually concerning family, school, or everyday problems. For instance:

"I made a mistake on my homework one day at school, and my teacher helped me understand it" (CS11).

These kinds of stories show a preference for realistic and socially relevant settings. This could be because of teaching methods that focus on moral growth and practical learning.

On the other hand, international students used more creative and made-up aspects, even when they were answering the identical question. For example:

"I found myself in a world where time stopped, and I had to find a way to get out" (FS9).

A another student wrote:

"I could change the situation and make it end better with my superpower" (FS6).

These examples show a stronger predisposition for creative world-building and imaginative inquiry. This suggests that the idea of a "meaningful experience" was understood more broadly to include hypothetical or fanciful situations.

This conclusion corroborates prior research demonstrating that the storytelling of children and young learners is affected by culturally constructed norms of creativity and expression (Duff, 2019). From a sociocultural standpoint, imagination can be perceived as culturally influenced, molded by the narratives to which learners are exposed and prompted to create.

8. Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the reflection of cultural aspects in English literary writings created by Chinese and international undergraduate students under a common educational framework in China. Utilizing Sociocultural Theory, the results indicate that students' narratives are not simply language expressions but culturally mediated constructions of meaning, influenced by internalized values, social experiences, and culturally specific narrative conventions.

The study uncovered three key patterns. First, Chinese students' writing generally focused on clear moral precepts and socially acceptable practices, which is what they were supposed to do. Foreign students' stories, on the other hand, were more likely to use experience and implicit reflection to convey meaning. This meant that readers had to figure out what the events meant instead of being told directly what they meant. Second, Chinese students often built stories around relational and collective frameworks that emphasized family, friends, and social harmony. On the other hand, international students tended to focus on individual agency and choosing their own choices. Third, the stories written by Chinese students were mostly based on real-life situations and social settings. On the other hand, the stories written by international students were more likely to be innovative and creative, even when they were given the same writing challenge.

These findings together affirm that, even in controlled environments, learners from diverse cultural origins utilize unique sociocultural resources in narrative construction. The study thus corroborates the perspective that language acquisition, especially within literary frameworks, is profoundly connected to culture. It is crucial to note that the observed variations should not be construed as hierarchical or evaluative; instead, they should be regarded as varied narrative orientations influenced by culturally mediated perceptions of the world.

This study enhances the literature by offering a comparative, context-sensitive analysis of international literary expression, concentrating on English literature students within a unified academic setting. It shows how cultural identity still affects how people make meaning, even when they are using the same language and learning environment.

9. Recommendations

This study's results lead to various suggestions for teaching, curriculum design, and future research:

1. Encourage Literary Pedagogy that is Culturally Responsive

Teachers should understand that the stories their pupils write are based on cultural narrative traditions. Instead of favoring one type of storytelling (like totally imaginative or purely structured), teachers should use methods that accept both moral-structured and creativity-driven stories.

2. Promote Balanced Narrative Growth

English literary writing classes should help students acquire both moral and thematic depth (which is common in Chinese students' writing) and creative and imaginative expression (which is more typical in foreign students' writing). This balance can help children learn new ways to tell stories while yet being true to their own culture.

3. Include writing activities from different cultures

Intercultural exchange and comparison writing exercises should be part of classroom activities so that students can:

- Read and analyze stories written by classmates from different cultures
- Think of other ways to tell a narrative
- Learn more about other cultures and be more open to different ways of expressing yourself

4. Give writing prompts that are flexible but structured

Teachers should make writing prompts that may be understood in more than one way so that students can show both realistic and imaginative points of view. They should also keep a common writing framework so that students can compare their work. This helps both analytical rigor and creative freedom.

5. Broaden Future Investigations

Future research may:

- Have bigger and more varied samples from more than one institution
- Use mixed-methods approaches to add quantitative validation to qualitative findings
- Look at how long-term exposure to other cultures affects how students' storytelling styles alter over time.

Moreover, subsequent study may investigate how pedagogical interventions can reconcile cultural disparities in literary expression and foster more cohesive storytelling methodologies.

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