Exploration of Teaching Strategies for Excerpted Novels in State-Compiled Senior High School Chinese Textbooks

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Abstract: Restricted by textbook capacity, classic literary works are incorporated into Chinese textbooks in the form of excerpts, covering diverse genres including novels, dramas, prose and poems. These excerpted texts have relatively independent ideological connotations and definite educational and teaching values. State-compiled senior high school Chinese textbooks contain a large number of excerpted novels across compulsory and selective compulsory volumes, enriching students' exposure to diverse literary genres. Nevertheless, current teaching of such excerpted novels often ignores the attribute of "excerption", which fails to facilitate students' in-depth text comprehension. Combining unit introductions, footnotes, study prompts and unit learning tasks in state-compiled textbooks, this paper proposes targeted teaching strategies for excerpted novel teaching.
Key words: state-compiled textbooks; novels; excerpts; teaching

Introduction

An excerpted text refers to "a relatively independent text selected from a complete article or a complete work" [1]. Excerpted texts are presented in different ways in state-compiled textbooks and can be identified according to the following three points: first, some are directly marked with "(Excerpt)" in the title; second, some footnotes indicate the source, or contain wording such as "selected from" or "adapted", for example, the footnote to The Man in the Case reads "selected from Selected Short Stories of Chekhov (China Youth Press, 1955 edition). Translated by Ru Long. Adapted"; third, identification also requires comparison between the textbook text and the original work. Based on the above three points, it can be found that excerpted texts in textbooks cover diverse genres: for example, Unit 7 of the compulsory volume 1 includes Shi Tiesheng's prose I and the Temple of Earth (Excerpt); Unit 2 of the compulsory volume 2, "Conscience and Compassion", includes three dramas, namely Injustice to Dou E (Excerpt), Thunderstorm (Excerpt) and Hamlet (Excerpt); Unit 1 of the selective compulsory volume 2 includes an excerpted poem, Qu Yuan's Li Sao (Excerpt).

State-compiled senior high school Chinese textbooks contain a considerable number of excerpted novels, running from the compulsory volumes to the selective compulsory volumes. According to the three identification methods above, the excerpted novels in the five volumes of state-compiled senior high school Chinese textbooks are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Summary of excerpted novels in state-compiled senior high school Chinese textbooks

Volume	Title	Author	Footnote
Compulsory volume 2	Instructor Lin at the Mountain Temple in Wind and Snow	Shi Naian	Selected from Chapter 9 of Water Margin (Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2015 edition).
	The Man in the Case	Chekhov	Selected from Selected Short Stories of Chekhov (China Youth Press, 1955 edition). Translated by Ru Long. Adapted.
	The Metamorphosis (Excerpt)	Kafka	Selected from Selected Short Stories of Kafka (Lijiang Publishing House, 2013 edition). Translated by Ye Tingfang. The full text consists of 3 parts; the textbook excerpts Part 1, with slight changes.
Selective compulsory volume 1	David Copperfield (Excerpt)	Dickens	Excerpted from David Copperfield (Henan Literature and Art Publishing House, 2015 edition). Translated by Song Zhaolin. Adapted.
	Resurrection (Excerpt)	Leo Tolstoy	Excerpted from Resurrection (Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 1983 edition). Translated by Cao Ying. The excerpt here is Chapter 43 of Part One.
	The Old Man and the Sea (Excerpt)	Hemingway	Selected from The Old Man and the Sea (People's Literature Publishing House, 2013 edition). Translated by Li Yuchao.
	One Hundred Years of Solitude (Excerpt)	García Márquez	Excerpted from One Hundred Years of Solitude (Nanhai Publishing Company, 2017 edition). Translated by Fan Ye. Slightly adapted.
Selective compulsory volume 2	The Marriage of Young Erhei (Excerpt)	Zhao Shuli	Selected from Volume 1 of Collected Works of Zhao Shuli (China Workers Publishing House, 2000 edition). The novel has twelve sections; the excerpt here is Sections 9 to 12.
Selective compulsory volume 3	The True Story of Ah Q (Excerpt)	Lu Xun	Selected from Call to Arms (Volume 1 of The Complete Works of Lu Xun, People's Literature Publishing House, 2005 edition). The novel has nine chapters; the excerpt here is Chapters 2 and 3.
	Border Town (Excerpt)	Shen Congwen	Selected from Volume 4 of The Complete Works of Shen Congwen (Sichuan People's Publishing House, 1983 edition). The novel has twenty-one chapters; the excerpt here is Chapters 3 to 6.

The table shows that the state-compiled senior high school Chinese textbooks contain a total of 10 excerpted novels. Among them, the compulsory textbooks include only 3 in volume 2, and the three texts — Instructor Lin at the Mountain Temple in Wind and Snow, The Man in the Case and The Metamorphosis (Excerpt) — are all placed in Unit 6, jointly constituting the unit's humanistic theme of "Observation and Criticism", reflecting social life, depicting human conditions and expressing reflections on life. Most excerpted novels are arranged in the selective compulsory textbooks; notably, Unit 3 of the selective compulsory volume 1 gathers four excerpted texts into one unit for concentrated study, consistent with the learning task group of "Study of Foreign Writers and Works". From the perspective of curriculum design, compulsory and selective compulsory courses place different demands on students: the compulsory course highlights "learning", while the selective compulsory course highlights "study and research", and most excerpted novels are arranged in the selective compulsory course, which places higher demands on students. From the perspective of the sources of the selected excerpted novels, they can be further divided into classic ancient Chinese works, collections of

modern and contemporary Chinese writers, and collections of foreign classics or writers — all famous works of past and present, Chinese and foreign, tested by time. From the perspective of the content of the selected excerpted novels, they fit students' reading interests and are strongly plot-driven.

At present, the teaching of excerpted novels is markedly challenging: the textbook excerpt is relatively independent, yet inevitably echoes the plot of the whole book before and after; and when a text enters the textbook, its teaching value must be considered, so that the Chinese class should not become a university literature class. Reading long works can cultivate students' independent reading ability, broaden their knowledge and lay a foundation for composition writing, but owing to limited class hours, teaching often ignores the two words "excerpt". Therefore, this paper takes "excerpt" as the starting point and proposes teaching strategies from four aspects: identifying the positioning accurately and understanding the intention of text selection; assigning preview to move toward in-depth reading; taking the textbook as the foundation and connecting with the whole book; and stimulating interest through extension and expansion.

1. Identifying the Positioning Accurately and Understanding the Intention of Text Selection

The literature history courses at the university stage provide pre-service teachers with the intensive reading of some works; teachers may refer to literature history textbooks to examine the selected novels in textbooks within the development of literature and clarify their position in literary history. Second, teachers should establish a holistic awareness: by reading the whole book, clarify the position of the excerpted text within the whole book, so as to analyze the editor's intention in selecting the text, determine the teaching content, and supplement and expand appropriately according to the needs of the textbook excerpt. For example, in Unit 3 of the selective compulsory volume 1, four excerpted foreign novels constitute "Diverse Cultural Landscapes". The excerpt from One Hundred Years of Solitude is the first half of Chapter 3 of the novel, beginning with "Macondo had changed", and describes the deeply metaphorical "insomnia plague". Reading the whole of One Hundred Years of Solitude is somewhat difficult for senior high school students; teaching can start from "change", introducing the content of the first three chapters — "What was Macondo like in the beginning?" — to connect with the textbook excerpt. With the groundwork of the earlier parts of the novel, students can better accept the excerpted passage.

According to teaching needs, teachers may introduce relevant passages beyond the textbook excerpt to serve the analysis of characters' personalities. For example, when analyzing Lin Chong's personality in Instructor Lin at the Mountain Temple in Wind and Snow, teachers may introduce the different attitudes of Lin Chong and Lu Zhishen toward Gao Yanei in Chapter 7: "At that moment Lin Chong pulled him over, but recognizing that it was the son of his superior Gao, his hand softened first." "Zhishen said: 'You fear his lord father the Grand Commandant, but what do I fear?'" [2]. Through the contrast between characters, students' understanding of Lin Chong's personality becomes more intuitive. At the same time, introducing passages beyond the excerpt can also attract students' interest in reading and lead them toward reading the whole of Water Margin.

2. Assigning Preview to Move Toward In-Depth Reading

Classroom teaching of excerpted novels should move toward in-depth reading, and after-class work should lead toward whole-book reading; the learning situation is one of the factors to be considered in lesson preparation. From the perspective of students' learning of the novel genre, students have already encountered novels in junior high school and are fairly familiar with the three elements of the novel, so senior high school novel teaching needs to rise in a graded manner on the basis of junior high school. In addition, the graded arrangement of the senior high school curriculum must be considered: senior high school arranges three types of courses — compulsory, selective compulsory and elective — and teaching difficulty must be set according to different course types so as to match students' learning at the current stage. Textbooks are also a factor to consider: state-compiled textbooks help students learn through footnotes and after-class study prompts. Students can use the footnote ① of the reading-support system to understand the plot preceding the

excerpted work, and can also obtain information related to the excerpt's plot, character images and theme through the after-class "study prompt". Therefore, at the preview stage, teachers need to set challenging preview tasks.

Taking Border Town (Excerpt) in the selective compulsory volume 2 as an example, the after-class "study prompt" of the textbook points out three learning tasks: grasping the personality traits of the characters; appreciating the role of customs description and scenery description; and exploring the author's creative motivation. On this basis, the teacher can set preview tasks: (1) sort out the plot of the excerpted part; (2) summarize the character images. The first task is relatively basic and simple for students, yet indispensable for novel reading. The textbook excerpts Chapters 3 to 6 of Border Town, which requires a certain amount of reading time; only when students preview and become familiar with the plot before class can class time be saved and a foundation laid for in-depth reading. The second task raises the difficulty on the basis of the first: the excerpt involves the Border Town girl Cuicui, the boatman grandfather, the Dragon Head Elder Shunshun, Shunshun's sons Tianbao and Nuosong, and the garrison officer, displaying military-civilian affection, local affection, family affection and romantic love. The process of summarizing characters' personalities is also the process of sorting out the plot, and at the same time completes the exploration of the novel's theme. Having completed the two tasks, students can already experience the "Shangri-La"-style rural society, laying a foundation for in-depth analysis of the author's creative motivation in class. Without any explanation from the teacher, students' independent reading ability is cultivated; through the preview of the excerpt, students develop interest in reading the whole book, and they can be encouraged to read before class, planting the seed for whole-book reading.

3. Taking the Textbook as the Foundation and Connecting with the Whole Book

Zhu Shaoyu remarks in An Overview of Secondary School Chinese Textbooks: "In addition to possessing the educational value of the complete text, an excerpted text enables students, by reading the excerpted article, to understand and master the knowledge of the entire work, playing the role of 'seeing the whole leopard through one spot'." [3] When an excerpted novel enters the Chinese textbook, its teaching value is determined by the "unit humanistic theme", the "learning task group to which the unit belongs" and the "unit learning tasks / unit study tasks"; it is relatively independent, yet literary works such as novels and dramas have plot coherence, so teaching inevitably needs to examine it within the whole text.

Instructor Lin at the Mountain Temple in Wind and Snow is selected into Unit 6 of the compulsory volume 2, "Observation and Criticism". Footnote ① reads "selected from Chapter 9 of Water Margin (Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2015 edition)." The after-class study prompt states: "When reading, you should clarify the thread of plot development and appreciate how Lin Chong was 'forced onto Liangshan' step by step", and "see the whole through one spot, and roughly understand the ideological and artistic achievements of Water Margin". To accomplish this, it is necessary to connect with the earlier chapters related to Lin Chong: Chapter 7, "The Tattooed Monk Uproots the Willow; the Panther Head Enters White Tiger Hall by Mistake", Chapter 8, "Instructor Lin Is Exiled to Cangzhou", and Chapter 9, "Instructor Lin Beats Instructor Hong with His Staff". Through sorting out the plot, students understand Lin Chong's work and family; through the before-and-after connection, they can better understand the word "forced" — Lin Chong, who was satisfied with his job and had a happy family and would not have rebelled, was "forced" onto Liangshan, which precisely embodies the major theme of "official oppression drives the people to rebellion" in Water Margin.

4. Stimulating Interest Through Extension and Expansion

An excerpted text "can also cultivate interest in reading long works, extend in-class reading to after class, expand the amount of reading, and improve the ability to read a whole work." [4] In the five volumes of state-compiled senior high school Chinese textbooks, the units corresponding to the learning task group of "Whole-Book Reading and Discussion" are Unit 5 of the compulsory volume 1, From the Soil (乡土中国), and Unit 7 of the compulsory volume 2, A Dream of Red Mansions; these explicitly specify the task of whole-book learning. However, whole-book reading in only two

units can hardly meet the reading volume of senior high school students.

The teaching suggestion for the learning task group of "Whole-Book Reading and Discussion" in the senior high school curriculum standards states: "The works designated for reading may be selected from the long works excerpted in textbook lessons." [5] This indicates that excerpted lessons may be appropriately extended to whole-book reading, using the excerpted lesson as an introduction to attract students' reading interest, and that the "Whole-Book Reading and Discussion" task group can be taught in coordination with other task groups. "Appendix 2: Suggestions on Readings Inside and Outside Class" also lists Lu Xun's Call to Arms and Wandering, Shen Congwen's Border Town, Dickens's David Copperfield and Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea, which are consistent with the excerpted texts. Similar descriptions also appear in the textbooks; for example, the "unit learning tasks" of Unit 6 of the compulsory volume 2 state: "Lin Chong's encounter was not merely caused by the persecution of Gao Qiu and his son … and, in combination with specific content, analyze the influence of the social environment on the characters' fate." Teachers can start from this task and guide students to read Water Margin, connecting Lin Chong with other similar characters in the work to analyze the influence of the social environment on characters' fate. In Unit 3 of the selective compulsory volume 1, "Diverse Cultural Landscapes", the study prompt for Resurrection (Excerpt) states: "After Nekhlyudov meets Maslova, what will the following story be like?" The study prompt indicates that teachers, when preparing lessons, need to understand the content of the whole book, attract students' reading interest through typical plots, and lead from the study of the excerpt to the reading of long works.

Conclusion

Different values can be excavated from a work from different angles; yet once a text is selected into a textbook and becomes part of the textbook, it is endowed with teaching value, and the unit introduction, study prompt and unit learning tasks / unit study tasks all offer teaching suggestions for it, avoiding the arbitrariness of Chinese teaching content. Teachers and students should take the textbook as the foundation, jointly complete the learning requirements stipulated by the curriculum standards, and cultivate senior high school students' four major Chinese core competencies. Therefore, an excerpted novel, constrained by the relevant requirements of the unit in which it is located, must in essence accomplish the teaching tasks of the textbook and expand within a reasonable range, without exceeding the boundary of the excerpt — the excerpt should be the focus.

References

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