

# **A Comparative Study on the Presentation of Cultural Elements in People's Education Press and Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press**

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### Abstract

Based on *the Framework for Analyzing Cultural Presentation in Foreign Language Textbooks* proposed by Zhang Hong and Li Xiaonan, this paper conducts a comparative study on the presentation of culture in the third-grade English textbooks in People's Education Press and Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. It is found that in terms of the presentation of regional cultures: firstly, both textbooks emphasize the culture of the mother tongue; secondly, the presentation of the culture of the target language countries in both textbooks is relatively limited, and the content of international cultures is also weak. In terms of the presentation of cultural forms: firstly, People's Education Press focuses on cultural practices, while Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press focuses on cultural products and cultural figures; secondly, the presentation of cultural communities in both editions is obviously insufficient. In terms of the way of presenting culture, both editions of the textbook use discourse and pictures as the main carriers, but the understanding of the cultural content is highly dependent on the teacher's explanation and guidance.

**Keywords:** Primary English textbooks, Cultural awareness, Regional culture, Cultural forms, Cultural representation

### I. Introduction

Driven by the wave of globalization, the educational value of English, as an international common language, has gone beyond the scope of language skills and become an important bridge connecting different cultures and promoting international communication and understanding. Derakhshan pointed out that in countries where English is a foreign language, English

textbooks are the basic basis of English teaching, not only introducing language knowledge, but more importantly, cultivating cultural awareness and competence, which is the the core of humanistic communication (Derakhshan, 2024). This viewpoint highlights the important role of English teaching materials in cultural transmission and communication. According to the English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition), the English curriculum in China's compulsory education stage should focus on cultivating students' cultural awareness, so that students can understand the excellent civilization achievements of different countries, compare the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures, cultivate the ability of cross-cultural communication and exchanges, and form healthy aesthetic interests and correct values (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2022).

The introduction of this standard further emphasizes the responsibility of English teaching materials in cultivating students' intercultural communicative competence. As an important part of elementary school English teaching materials, the construction of the cultural framework and the choice of content have a profound impact on students' cultural cognition, values and cross-cultural communicative competence. As the two authoritative editions of elementary school English textbooks in China, the choice of cultural presentation and content of the People's Education Press and the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press is particularly critical.

Therefore, this study selects the elementary school English textbooks in People's Education Press and Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press as the objects. It conducts an

analysis from three perspectives—regional culture, cultural forms, and ways of cultural presentation—on how culture is represented in these two editions. Based on the curriculum standards' objectives for cultivating cultural awareness in third-grade primary school students, this study investigates and analyzes the current setting and achievement level of cultural content in existing textbooks. The aim is to better understand the alignment between teaching content and curriculum goals, providing a reference for subsequent teaching optimization.

## **II. Literature Review**

With the current international cross-cultural communication activities becoming more and more frequent, cultivating cross-cultural communication competence has been increasingly emphasized in foreign language teaching (Xiao, L. F., 2004). In order to cope with the changes in the international situation and cultivate international talents with global vision, intercultural communication skills and professionalism, the English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition) (hereinafter referred to as the new standards) puts forward a new direction of talent cultivation, which is to cultivate not only the learners' comprehensive language use ability, but also to pay more attention to the quality of thinking and cultural awareness that are formed by the learners during the language learning, and to cultivate the all-around development of the talents. The textbooks, as carriers of language knowledge, are the most important tools for the development of learners. Teaching materials, as carriers of language knowledge, tools for cultural transmission and value shaping, and media for the implementation of the curriculum standards, play an important role in the cultivation of students' intercultural communi-

cative competence. The education department has responded positively to the relevant requirements of the new curriculum standard and revised the content and structure of the teaching materials, increasing the integration of cultural elements, and in September 2024 it was officially put into use.

Cultural education is very important for the cultivation of students' intercultural communicative competence, and it is also an important part of the realization of the fundamental task of establishing moral character. How to cultivate and develop students' intercultural competence in understanding and appreciating the diversified cultures of the world based on the Chinese cultural market and telling Chinese stories in English has become a cultural mission carried by English teaching materials in the new era (Guo, B. X., 2020). The author searched the Internet with the keyword "cultural content of English teaching materials", selected core journals and found that the research on the cultural elements of teaching materials is mainly reflected in the teaching materials of middle and higher education. It mainly provides suggestions for the preparation of elementary school English textbooks, and systematically examines the cultural content presented in the textbooks for the purpose of cultivating intercultural competence from the three dimensions of textbook writing principles, content arrangement and practice activities (Zhang, T. F., et al., 2023). Current domestic and foreign textbooks show an eclectic cultural vision: rooted in the soil of the mother tongue culture, but also oriented to the intermingling of world civilizations, and the core of its content always revolves around the fundamental issues of common concern to mankind. Comparative studies have found that domestic English textbooks have failed to effectively transform some Chinese cultural elements that have

gained high international recognition into teaching resources in terms of content selection, which is undoubtedly a noteworthy phenomenon in cultural communication (Guo, B. X., et al., 2024). The analysis of cultural content in primary and secondary school textbooks is a relatively weak link in current research, which argues that the current cultural presentation of some textbooks is insufficient in number and one-sided in content, which not only affects students' knowledge and understanding of Chinese culture, but also hinders the effective dissemination of Chinese culture and cross-cultural communication. (Yuan, X. J., 2024).

Systematically analyzing the current situation of cultural integration in primary and secondary English teaching materials is the key to promoting the construction of educational integration and implementing the coherent and progressive ideological and political education of teaching materials (Yang, Y. H., et al., 2024). In addition, the current research in this field mostly focuses on the analysis of cultural content, but pays insufficient attention to the presentation form of cultural content, and the existing research has limitations in analyzing the methodological level, and the scientificity needs to be improved. (Zhang, H., & Li, X. N., 2022). Elementary school English is an important part of English teaching, and it is a critical period for students to cultivate cultural awareness and moral quality. In view of this, the purpose of this paper is to systematically explore and compare the cultural presentation of the English textbooks in the first three grades of the People's Education Press and the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, and to specifically analyze the characteristics of the composition and presentation of their cultural content.

### III. Research Design

#### (i) Research Questions

Based on *the Framework for Analyzing the Cultural Presentation of Foreign Language Teaching Materials*, this study analyzes the third-grade English teaching materials of the People's Education Press and Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press editions of elementary school, focusing on the cultural contents, presentation ways, and the corresponding humanistic goals of the two editions of teaching materials. The study focuses on the following two questions: (1) What are the differences and commonalities between the two versions of textbooks in terms of the selection and presentation of cultural content? (2) Does the presentation of cultural elements in the textbooks help students understand cultural connotations so as to achieve the goal of cultivating cultural awareness in the new standards?

#### (ii) Objects of the Study

In this study, two mainstream English textbooks published by People's Education Press (hereinafter referred to as "PEP") and Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (hereinafter referred to as "FLTRP"), both of which are the newest editions of the year 2024, are selected as the objects of the study. These textbooks have been validated by national authorities and are widely used throughout the country, meeting the requirements of the current curriculum standards and guaranteeing the accuracy of the knowledge content and the scientificity of the subject system. In terms of writing concepts and content organization, the two editions of the textbook have their own characteristics: the PEP emphasizes the use of English to convey

the local culture and content, while the FLTRP pays more attention to the integration of international perspectives and multicultural elements. Although there are some differences in their instructional design, they both have important comparative and research value. Therefore, this paper decides to take these two textbooks as the samples to be analyzed for further discussion.

### **(iii) Research Framework**

This study takes *the Framework for Analyzing Cultural Presentation in Foreign Language Teaching Materials* (hereinafter referred to as the Framework) constructed by Zhang Hong and Li Xiaonan as the theoretical basis for a systematic examination of the third-grade English textbooks of the PEP and the FLTRP of the Primary School. The Framework divides the cultural content of the textbooks into three analytical dimensions: regional culture, cultural form and cultural presentation. Among them, regional cultures are further categorized into four types: learners' mother tongue culture (i.e., Chinese culture), target language countries' cultures (mainly referring to the cultures of inner-circle countries in which English is the mother tongue), international cultures (encompassing the cultures of outer-circle countries), and shared cultures (referring to the cultural forms that do not have any obvious national attributes or geographic differences).

Cultural forms include cultural practices, cultural products, cultural figures, cultural communities and cultural concepts. Cultural products refer to the material or symbolic achievements created by human beings to satisfy their needs for survival and development, and are the tangible carriers of culture, such as traditional costumes, literary works, and architecture; cultural practices are the recurring behavioral patterns within a specific group, involving daily life

styles and ceremonial activities; cultural concepts represent the abstract value system that a certain group of people follows, including beliefs and values; cultural figures refer to real or fictional individuals who symbolize culture, such as historical celebrities or cartoon images; cultural communities are constructed based on common cultural characteristics. Cultural figures refer to real or fictional individuals with symbolic significance to culture, such as historical celebrities or cartoon images; cultural communities are group boundaries constructed on the basis of common cultural characteristics, usually at the level of the state or nation.

#### (iv) Research Steps

First, based on the Framework, the cultural content in the PEP and the FLTRP was coded in terms of its geographical region, presentation form, presentation way, textbook, page number, and unit, and so on. Subsequently, the strength of each cultural content was quantitatively analyzed using the formula "strength = weight  $\times$  frequency". The weights were determined with reference to the framework for analyzing the cultural presentation of English textbooks proposed by Zhang Hong et al. in the aforementioned *Framework*, the specific structure of which is shown in the figure below.

Method	Weighting	Explanation
1. Monocultural Text	10	A text that focuses on a single cultural theme and elaborates on that culture throughout.
2. Primary Culture in a Multi-cultural Text	9	The cultural content that occupies the largest portion of a text themed around multiple different cultures.

3. Two or More Cultures of Equal Proportion in a Multicultural Text	8	Two or more cultural elements that occupy similar portions of a text themed around multiple different cultures.
4. Secondary Culture in a Multicultural Text	7	The cultural content that occupies a smaller portion of a text themed around multiple different cultures, as opposed to the "Primary Culture".
5. Monocultural Knowledge Section	6	A dedicated knowledge section that elaborates on a single cultural content throughout.
6. Primary Culture in a Multicultural Knowledge Section	5	The cultural content that occupies the largest portion of a knowledge section introducing multiple different cultures.
7. Two or More Cultures of Equal Proportion in a Multicultural Knowledge Section	4	Two or more cultural elements that occupy similar portions of a knowledge section introducing multiple different cultures.
8. Secondary Culture in a Multicultural Knowledge Section	3	The cultural content that occupies a smaller portion of a knowledge section introducing multiple different cultures, as opposed to the "Primary Culture".
9. Image/Quotation	2	Images and quotations presented in non-exercise parts (e.g., texts, knowledge sections) that reflect cultural content.
10. Background Cultural Information	1	Cultural information serving as context to aid in understanding the aforementioned cultural texts, images, quotations, or other explicitly presented cultural elements, including personal names, place names, media names, etc.

In view of the fact that elementary school textbooks are characterized by strong intuition,

mostly presented in the form of dialogues and clear levels of activities, in the frequency counting, "an activity" was defined as the frequency of one occurrence, and the activity belonging to the part of the input material was categorized as explicit and coded for the way of presentation, based on which the data of the two versions were summarized and compared. On this basis, the data of the two versions were summarized and compared, and the intensity and percentage of different regional cultures, cultural forms and cultural presentation methods were calculated and analyzed accordingly, so that corresponding suggestions could be made to the writers and teachers.

#### **IV、 Research Findings**

(i) Before analyzing the cultural content of the textbooks, we can first develop a general understanding of the overall hierarchical structure of the thematic units in both sets. Firstly, there are several commonalities: both textbooks introduce fundamental school etiquette, social greeting protocols, and manners; they focus on themes related to humans and nature, including content about animals and plants, aimed at guiding students to recognize a vibrant, diverse world—including learning about colors. While engaging in digital learning, both incorporate concepts related to consumption awareness.

The key difference lies in the presentation of the "family" theme: the People's Education Press edition explicitly presents "small and large families" as a dedicated unit, whereas the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press edition does not emphasize family size differences but instead promotes the concept of "a happy family" overall.

It is evident that the purpose behind both textbooks' compilation is aligned: to enable

students to master common English expressions used in daily life, to develop their ability to communicate with others in English—including introducing family members and friends, confidently asking about objects' names in English, discussing daily life topics, colors, numbers, as well as flora and fauna.

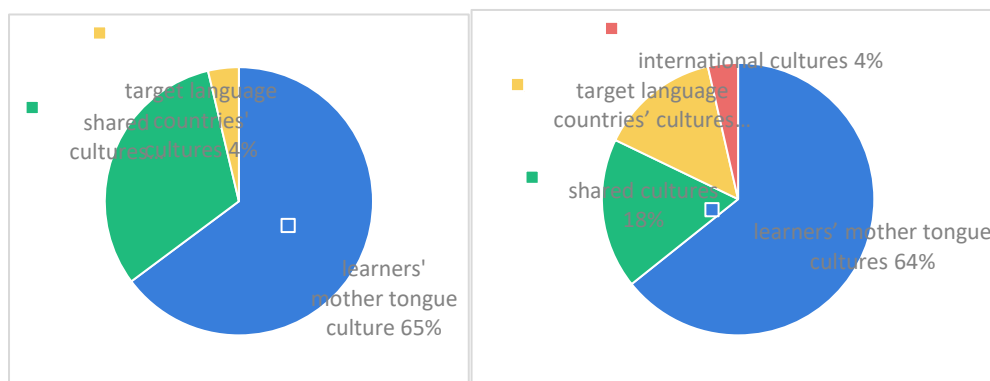
Additionally, they aim to cultivate values such as love for nature, enthusiasm for learning, and self-care. They also introduce basic phonetic rules to lay a foundation for subsequent learning. Furthermore, the textbooks encourage students to listen actively, speak confidently, read extensively, and apply language skills practically, fostering proactive collaboration and inquiry among classmates and exploring the mysteries within the textbook content.

(ii) In terms of cultural content, the differences between the two versions are quite significant. From a regional culture perspective, the native culture is the starting point for students to understand the world, helping them appreciate Chinese culture and build cultural confidence; shared culture, as a universal cultural element worldwide, has no clear regional or ethnic boundaries. Incorporating it into textbooks exposes students to excellent cultural achievements from around the world, helping cultivate a global perspective, serving as a bridge for communication among students from different cultural backgrounds, and forming the foundation for cross-cultural competence. The culture of target language countries and international culture are channels for students to understand the world and broaden their horizons, and are important ways to improve personal cultural literacy and tolerance. Although both textbooks focus heavily on native and shared cultures, the People's Education Press (PEP) version is markedly biased toward native culture, accounting for nearly 65% of the cultural content, with shared culture comprising

about 32%. The presentation of target country culture is very limited, making up less than 4%. The PEP textbook shows a clear local cultural tendency, emphasizing traditional Chinese culture and values, while also addressing commonalities between Chinese and foreign cultures, with relatively less focus on cultural specifics of English-speaking countries. This distribution. The value of using textbooks lies in cultivating students' abilities and values; users should maximize this value by making full use of multimedia resources to present content vividly. Considering primary students' cognitive characteristics and the limited refinement of elementary textbooks, teachers face high demands: they must manage the course pace effectively while expanding textbook knowledge. Cultural content in textbooks is often presented through images, which are more effective when elaborated upon or supported by audio-visual materials. Otherwise, images alone may diminish their educational impact. This study investigates the forms and methods of cultural presentation in two versions of textbooks, aiming to offer some guidance to publishers and users. Given the context of textbook publishing, only the first volume for third grade was selected for the initial research; future work will extend to the entire primary school curriculum. The value of using textbooks lies in cultivating students' abilities and values; users should maximize this value by making full use of multimedia resources to present content vividly. Considering primary students' cognitive characteristics and the limited refinement of elementary textbooks, teachers face high demands: they must manage the course pace effectively while expanding textbook knowledge. Cultural content in textbooks is often presented through images, which are more effective when elaborated upon or supported by audio-visual materials. Otherwise, images alone may diminish their educational impact. This study investigates the

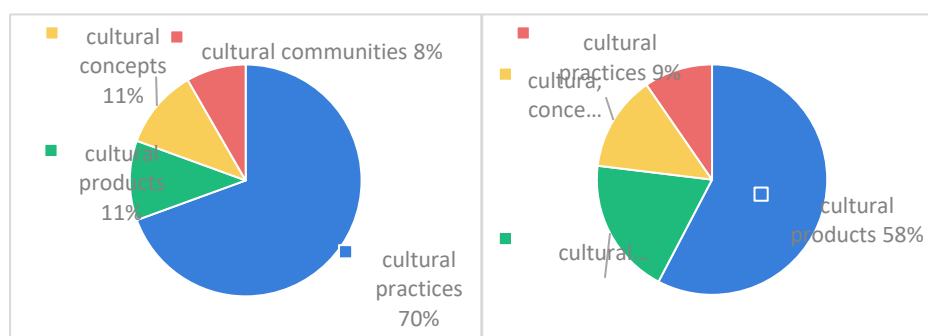
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daily lives to enable quick practical application of knowledge. Conversely, the FLTRP emphasizes cultural diversity and richness through introducing friends from different countries, distinctive architecture, and renowned cultural figures and landmarks like British celebrities, broadening students' cultural horizons. In terms of native culture, FLTRP covers a wide array of cultural practices, traditional arts, and historical stories, such as National Day, longevity peaches, pandas, red lanterns, Mulan, Chinese knots, and ink painting. The People's Education Press, however, focuses more on traditional festivals and simple cultural activities like Spring Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, and shadow puppetry.



(iii) From the perspective of cultural presentation forms, the People's Education Press (PEP) textbooks have the highest proportion of cultural practice, accounting for 69.4%, with an intensity score of 75. Cultural products and cultural concepts are tied for second, each accounting for 11.1% with a score of 12, while cultural communities have the lowest share at 8.3%, with a score of 9. The textbook clearly leans towards practical teaching in its cultural content, emphasizing conveying cultural knowledge through hands-on activities, aligning with the practical nature of language learning. At the same time, the presentation of cultural products and ideas makes up a significant portion, forming a cultural display system that combines practice

with various formats. The red scarf, a prominent behavioral symbol, is worn by Chinese elementary students (Young Pioneers) in classrooms; it symbolizes revolutionary tradition and represents the mission of Young Pioneers in the new era—to be ambitious, capable, and responsible. The FLTRP textbooks focus more on cultural products and figures, which account for 78%, with cultural concepts at 13% and cultural practices at 9%. Their cultural presentation is mainly visual and straightforward, with innovative drama content at the end of units, such as “Mulan,” a classic figure in ancient Chinese literature whose core spirit transcends time and has a profound influence. However, the People’s Education Press does not include information about cultural figures. Regarding cultural concepts, the PEP emphasizes individual emotions, family, and social values, such as friendship and family concepts, while the FLTRP emphasizes teamwork and daily habits, like cooperation and stationery management. Both editions involve the family as a cultural concept, but as noted, the PEP more distinctly contrasts small and large family models. Both textbooks provide vital support for students’ English learning and cultural literacy, helping them understand culture better, foster emotional connections, and enhance communication skills.



(iii) From the perspective of cultural presentation methods, most of the cultural content in both textbooks is presented through cultural discourse, mainly in the form of dialogues, with

a small amount of listening discourse. For example, in the People's Education Edition, Unit 5 The colorful world dialogue discourse guides students to explore the scientific mysteries behind colors, cultivating scientific thinking and inquiry spirit; in the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press edition, Unit 1 Let's be friends! listening discourse introduces students to friends from different countries and their characteristic architecture, helping them understand cultural diversity, and develop a global perspective and cross-cultural communication skills. Both editions use pictures to present cultural content, but students' understanding of these contents largely depends on the teacher's explanation, which places high demands on teachers.

## **V. Results and Discussion**

From the above analysis, it can be observed that the cultural representation in the People's Education Press and Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press editions of the third-grade primary school English textbooks each exhibit several distinctive features:

Firstly, the content of regional culture is rich and presented in diverse formats. Both editions encompass introductions to the culture of the native language, the target language countries, and shared cultural elements. The People's Education edition includes cultural products such as ink wash paintings and traditional Chinese attire, as well as cultural practices like the Spring Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival, along with cultural concepts. The Foreign Language Teaching and Research edition features cultural notions such as friendship and animal families, cultural products like calligraphy brushes and Chinese knots, and cultural practices including environmental protection activities. This demonstrates a wide array of cultural content, adopting a pluralistic and enriched cultural perspective to guide learners' initial understanding of the

world, foster correct values, cultivate cross-cultural awareness, and build cultural confidence. Simultaneously, it encourages recognition of cultural differences with an open and inclusive mindset, preparing students for future learning and life.

Secondly, the presentation methods are diverse. Both editions mainly utilize dialogues and images to showcase cultural elements, enabling learners to directly perceive cultural concepts embedded in specific contexts. Through activities such as role-playing, learners can experience and internalize these cultural elements firsthand, facilitating their outward expression during practice exercises. This approach simplifies the process for language beginners to feel and experience different cultures, enriching their experiential learning and broadening their cognitive horizons.

Thirdly, the educational orientation is comprehensive. Both editions emphasize cultivating learners' good study habits and positive attitudes, guiding them to explore life and nature, ultimately aiming to develop well-rounded individuals with a healthy mindset. They focus on Chinese culture and international understanding, encouraging students to analyze, interpret, and judge cultural differences between China and foreign countries, thereby fostering intercultural communication skills. Additionally, they emphasize the development of students' moral qualities, nurturing courteous, respectful, cooperative, and frugal learners.

Currently, the two versions of the textbooks exhibit limited cultural diversity in their presentations. The regional cultural focus varies between the editions; while both maintain relatively balanced allocations of shared and native language cultural content, they still lack suf-

efficient exposure to the target country's cultural elements and overlook the cultures of other nations. Content-wise, both emphasize cultural practices and ideologies as primary dimensions, with comparatively weaker emphasis on cultural products; additionally, there is a neglect of dynamic carriers such as cultural communities and individuals. In terms of presentation methods, although varied in form, activity design predominantly extends existing discourses and relies heavily on mechanical exercises, which may result in superficial content depth. Cultural elements are often mainly conveyed through dialogues and visuals, with the People's Education Press edition using images primarily as contextual background information.

Based on these observations, the following recommendations are proposed for textbook developers and users:

Firstly, from a regional cultural perspective, it is essential to incorporate both the cultures of the target language country (inner-circle countries) and those of other outer-circle nations. This enrichment broadens learners' understanding of global cultural diversity, enhances their intercultural awareness, and can be achieved by utilizing multimedia resources in the classroom to showcase traditional practices from various countries. This approach encourages students to develop cultural confidence rooted in their traditions while adopting a more inclusive attitude toward cultural pluralism.

Secondly, regarding presentation modes, cultural elements should be expressed through diverse formats. Emphasis should be placed on balancing cultural practices with cultural products to facilitate direct, experiential understanding of their appeal. Highlighting cultural com-

munities fosters awareness that culture is often upheld by shared values and beliefs within specific groups, and recognizing the diversity among different communities promotes acknowledgment of cultural differences, cultivating a broad, intercultural perspective. Increasing the prominence of cultural figures—whose exemplary roles can have a more profound educational impact than words alone—should be prioritized. Stories of model individuals can be integrated into unit extension sections, combining visuals and text to narrate their achievements and transforming core socialist values into vivid, relatable cases that serve as meaningful educational models. Finally, cultural concepts should be woven into every activity. Given the cognitive level of elementary students, and based on curriculum requirements, it's vital to deepen cultural content while also emphasizing presentation methods. Superficial images will limit educational effectiveness; thus, refining language explanations for cultural elements can facilitate their organic integration into lessons, ultimately realizing the curriculum's intrinsic value. This also involves enriching the modes of cultural presentation without increasing students' academic burdens.

Ultimately, the core mission of the textbooks is to leverage language as a bridge to strengthen students' cultural confidence and national identity, systematically fostering their intercultural communication skills, and guiding them to become conscious transmitters of Chinese culture. By engaging with diverse cultures, cultivating respect, tolerance, and openness, students grow into modern citizens who are morally grounded, courteous, and knowledgeable, with a broad worldview.

The value of textbook utilization lies in cultivating students' skills, values, and

worldview. Users of textbooks should focus on maximizing their educational potential by fully leveraging multimedia resources to present content in a more vivid and engaging manner. Considering the cognitive characteristics of elementary students, the scope of textbook content is concise and limited, which places high demands on teachers to skillfully manage the curriculum pace while also expanding students' knowledge beyond the core material. Since cultural knowledge in textbooks is often depicted through images, teachers' explanations or audio-visual presentations can enhance their educational function; otherwise, solely relying on images might diminish their effectiveness. This study explores the presentation forms and methods of cultural content in two versions of textbooks, aiming to provide some reference for authors and users. Given the scope of textbook publishing, only the third-grade first semester textbook was selected for this research, with plans to further study and improve the understanding of entire elementary school textbooks in the future.

**Conflict of Interest:** The corresponding author confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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