# UNVEILING THE CULTURAL RICHNESS: CHINESE ELEMENTS IN INTERMEDIATE-LEVEL LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS

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| Article Info | Abstract |
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| **Keywords:** Chinese language education, cultural elements, intermediate level, post-epidemic era, international students | In the post-epidemic era, a new period, how to tell Chinese stories well is one of the important topics in international Chinese language education. As an essential part of teaching, the cultural elements in the textbooks are the starting point and the basis for learners to know and understand Chinese culture. The intermediate level is an important stage of Chinese language learning, and the linkage effect of the middle stage directly relates to the student's desire to learn more about the Chinese language and Chinese culture in depth. The choice and presentation of cultural factors in the middle classroom directly affect cultural teaching and learning. This article explores effective strategies to integrate Chinese cultural elements into intermediate-level Chinese language education, facilitating a deeper understanding of Chinese culture and enhancing the cultural learning experience for international students. |

## 1.  Introduction

In the post-epidemic era, a new period, how to tell Chinese stories well is one of the important topics in international Chinese language education. As an essential part of teaching, the cultural elements in the textbooks are the starting point and the basis for learners to know and understand Chinese culture. The intermediate level is an important stage of Chinese language learning, and the linkage effect of the middle stage directly relates to the student's desire to learn more about the Chinese language and Chinese culture in depth. The choice and presentation of cultural factors in the middle classroom directly affect cultural teaching and learning.

## 2.  Literature Review

In the presentation of the cultural factors in the textbooks, Zhang [1] distinguished the cultural factors in the teaching of foreign Chinese language into two sections: "knowledge culture" and "communication culture", which had a far-reaching influence on the cultural aspects of later Chinese language teaching. Lu[2] believed that in the preparation of textbooks in the primary and secondary classes, the language form should be closely linked to the cultural project through text and notes to demonstrate culture and reproduce it in practice accordingly. In his study, Li[3] proposed that cultural factors should be presented by the principles of "multi-angle", "limited" and "external contrast", "ancient and present connections", and "non-exaggeration".

In the presentation of cultural factors in the textbooks, Zhao[4]believed that innovation in cultural factors should be based on comparative research and develop targeted textbooks suitable for different countries, mother tongues, cultural backgrounds, and cultural environments. Zhao[5]suggested that cultural material should be based on its basic and academic nature, the importance of cultural differences, and a focus on interesting materials. Ni[6] divided the cultural elements in the textbooks into knowledge culture, communication culture, and national

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culture, and after studying the existing textbooks, put forward the idea that "national culture should adapt to social development and corresponding improvement, and the culture of custom that is not compatible with modern society in knowledge culture should remain unchanged or even decrease.

The Development of the Chinese Language and The New Practical Chinese Textbooks (hereinafter referred to as The Development and The New Practical) are widely used not only in China but also abroad as mainstream textbooks for the foreign Chinese language teaching community. At present, however, both studies focus on the overall analysis and the contrast between the distribution and arrangement of language elements. The overall analysis of contrast studies focuses on the macro and theoretical dimensions, and the subtle content studies cannot be reconciled. Especially in terms of cultural factors, the detailed comparative analyses of the two materials are relatively lacking.

**3.    Quantitative Analyses of Cultural Factors in the Development and The New Practical**

*3.1 Methods of Definition, Selection and Statistical Analysis of Cultural Factors*

This paper is intended to statistically and analytically compile the cultural factors involved in the two sets of textbooks. Concerning the conceptual definition of cultural factors, it is assumed that the definition of major cultural factors relates to the topic of the text, whereas the number of cultural factors is defined by the number of relevant words that appear in the text. Based on this, we define the cultural factors that appear in the textbook from the point of view of presentation, that is, those that appear in textbooks, with Chinese-specific cultural backgrounds, cannot be understood by direct translation of the language and are classified as the category of cultural factors.

In addition, in the choice of cultural factors, the academic community is also disseminated, This paper mainly refers to the view of Li and Yang[7] in three ways, "direct presentation", "additional presentation", and "contentious presentation", respectively, the selection and statistics of the cultural factors presented in the two sets of textbooks. A direct presentation is a direct description of a particular cultural or cultural phenomenon that is focused on by an editor in the preparation of a text. An additional presentation is a presentation of cultural content that is accompanied by a complete or complementary expression in the narrative process of straightforward content. The "contentious representation" does not derive cultural factors from the narrative and expression of the text directly, but rather through the cultural factors through the ideological feelings behind the text. This method is often used to present abstract and biased ideas.

On the classification and analysis of cultural factors, this paper refers to *The International Framework for the Classification of Cultural Factors of Chinese Language Textbooks* (hereinafter referred to as *The Frameworks*) studied by the Centre for International Chinese Language Learning Materials of Sun Yat-sen University. This framework contains a total of 2,772 cultural factors of international Chinese language textbooks, in total four levels. The first level has five categories, respectively: A, China's national situations; B, Achievements in culture; C, Daily life and customs; D, Communication activities; E, Ideology. From the first to fourth levels, the second level includes 46 classes, the third level includes 212, and the fourth level includes 70 categories.

*3.2 Comparison of Statistics and Analysis of the Number of Cultural Factors*

*3.2.1 Total Number*

The total number of chapters in the two volumes of *The Development (Intermediate comprehensive courses I II)* is 30 chapters and the number of cultural factors reaches 174, with an average of 5.8 per lesson. *The New Practical (Vol 5, 6)* consists of 20 chapters, and the total number of cultural factors is 215, with an average of 10.8 per lesson.

For each volume, the number of cultural factors for *the development I* was 83, representing 48 % of the total number, while for *the development II*, the total amounted to 91 cultural factors, representing 52 %. *Meanwhile,* for *The New Practical* 5 and *The New Practical* 6, the numbers are 93, 43% and 125, 58 % respectively.

The gap between the total numbers of cultural factors in the two sets of textbooks is relatively large, and the number of total cultural factors and the average per lesson in the less than 10 lessons in *The New Practical* is still higher than in *The Development*. There is a tendency to increase the number of cultural items in each subset, and there is a small difference in the increase. This indicates to some extent that both sets of textbooks are based on

certain criteria in the preparation of cultural factors, taking into account the quantitative balance, and can gradually increase the number of culture points with the depth of the learning.

### 3.2.2 Statistical Analysis of the Type of Cultural Factors

The following are statistics of the cultural factors of the two textbooks by type of *The Framework*.

*Table 1: Statistics on the Number of Cultural Factors at The First Level of The Framework*

| Cultural Factors Project | The development | The New Practical |
|---|---|---|
| A. China's national situations | 54 | 82 |
| B. Achievements in Culture | 68 | 87 |
| C. Daily life and customs | 38 | 41 |
| D. Communication activities | 7 | 2 |
| E. Ideology | 7 | 4 |

From the data in Table 1, it is clear that the two sets of textbooks for the first level of the cultural point are arranged in the following order:

*The development*: B>A>C>D>E;

*The New Practical*: B> A> C>E>D.

*Table 2: Statistics on The Distribution of Cultural Factors in China's National Situations (A)*

| Cultural Factors Project | The development | The New Practical |
|---|---|---|
| Politics and Law | 2 | 2 |
| Economy | 4 | 0 |
| Geography | 31 | 52 |
| History | 2 | 6 |
| People | 5 | 18 |
| Education | 2 | 0 |
| Family | 1 | 1 |
| Social Security | 2 | 0 |
| China Sports | 3 | 0 |

As can be seen from the data in Table 2, in this classification, *The development* and *The New Practical* classify the most cultural factors by Geography and People.

Compared to *the Development*, *The New Practical* lacks cultural factors of Economy, Education and Chinese sports, while the two sets of textbooks do not cover cultural factors such as Mass media, Gender, Environment and Cultural heritage.

*Table 3: Statistics on The Distribution of Cultural Factors in Achievements in Culture (B)*

| Cultural Factors Project | The development | The New Practical |
|---|---|---|
| Science and Technology | 1 | 2 |
| Arts | 15 | 8 |
| Literature | 2 | 27 |
| Language and Letters | 50 | 58 |

Table 3 clearly shows that, in this catalogue, *The Development* and *The New Practical* have the highest cultural factors for Language and letters, with 74 % and 68%, in whole factors respectively. *The New Practical* accounts for a greater proportion of cultural factors in Literature projects compared to *The development*, while Art projects

account for less than it. Both have fewer cultural factors in Science and technology projects, accounting for 1% and 2% respectively.

From the data in Table 4, in this field, *The development* and *The New Practical* distribution of cultural factors focuses on different aspects. *The New Practical* is mostly focused on Customs of Diet, up to 48 %, and other items are more evenly distributed, but no distributed-on items such as Customs of Clothing, Transportation, Measurement criteria, Shopping consumption, and Security. *The development* is more evenly distributed, and other items are distributed except for Shopping consumption, Measurement criteria, Entertainment and Health projects.

In the Communication Activities and Ideology Classification[2], both sets of materials have cultural factors representation in Communication situation norms and Intercultural Communication projects, with the distribution ratio of development at 71 % and 29 %, respectively, and *The new practical* at 50 %.

*Table 4: Statistics on the Distribution of Cultural Factors in Daily Life and Customs(C)*

| Cultural Factors Project | The development | The New Practical |
|---|---|---|
| Customs of Clothing | 3 | 0 |
| Customs of Diet | 8 | 20 |
| Residence | 6 | 3 |
| Studying and Working | 1 | 2 |
| Family Life | 1 | 2 |
| Transportation | 0 | 0 |
| Communications | 3 | 0 |
| Measurement criteria | 0 | 0 |
| Shopping consumption | 0 | 0 |
| Entertainment and Health | 0 | 3 |
| Festival and solar terms | 6 | 2 |
| Ceremony | 5 | 4 |
| Superstitions and symbols | 3 | 3 |
| Security | 1 | 0 |

In the Ideological Classification, both the cultural factors of *The development* and *The New Practice* are focused on Values and Religious beliefs, and the highest proportion in the value project is 43 % or 75 % respectively; except the 14 % share of development in the time and space vision project, the remaining two sets of textbooks have no representations.

### 3.2.3 Statistical Analysis of the Way Cultural Factors Are Presented

To ensure the accuracy and objectivity of the comparison, this study is divided into two sets of cultural factors presentation: title, text, notes, exercises, secondary text and assignment of six parts[3] for statistical and contrast analysis.

*Table 5: Statistics on The Way of Cultural Factors are Presented*

| Presentation | The development | The New Practical |
|---|---|---|
| Title | 11 | 10 |
| Text | 62 | 105 |
| Notes | 59 | 16 |
| Exercises | 29 | 14 |

[2] The dates of this part are too less, so it is not presented separately.
[3] To make an objective contrast, in this paper, the vocabulary of "The development" is classified into the general class of the text, grammatical training is categorized as practice, and the long text of reading training is treated as a secondary class; the grammar training of "New Practice" is categorized as practice class, reading, session, and listening exercises are combined into the subclass.

| Secondary text | 6 | 67 |
|---|---|---|
| Assignment | 7 | 3 |

In Table 5, the two sets of textbooks are presented primarily in the Way of Text in the cultural factors, *The new practical* accounts for up to 50% of the presentation, and the Text of *The development* accounts for 36% of the main part of its presentation. The Title and the Assignment as the presentation of cultural factors are not much compared, it can be seen that the two textbooks are prepared without considering the addition of too many cultural factors in both parts.

In contrast, *The development* tends to showcase cultural factors through Notes, with a 34 % share in the way it is presented, just behind the Text. *The new practical* is focused more on presenting cultural factors in the Secondary text, with 32%. The development uses Exercises as a way of presenting, a much larger share than *The new practical*, which is 17 %, and only 7 % of the latter.

## 4. Cultural Factors Assessment

The principle of preparation and selection of international Chinese textbooks in combination with the characteristics of the textbooks can be summarized as " The five principles"[8], that is: targeted, practical, scientific, interesting and systematic. The evaluation of cultural factors in this paper can also be based on the analysis of the nature of the above five articles to correctly understand and evaluate the cultural elements in the textbooks.

### 4.1 Targeted

Targeted means that the selection of materials for the preparation of different countries, groups, age groups, and learning stages should be focused. But *The development* and *The new practical* are comprehensive materials, and this type of textbook focuses on language skills "Comprehensive ". Thus, combined with targeting the analysis of cultural factors can be started from the learning stage. The intermediate level in the whole of the Chinese as a second language learning stage belongs to the linkage stage, in the cultural factor, on the one hand, to gradually supplement new cultural factors, and on the other hand to replicate and consolidate the basic knowledge of the previous stage.

In terms of the number of cultural factors, both sets of materials are gradually increasing with the progress of learning. This is in line with the requirement of gradual sequence in quantity of medium-stage cultural factors. This reflects the targeting of different learning stages.

### 4.2 Practical and Interesting

It is practical and interesting to complement each other, which refers to the material being close to reality and life when preparing and choosing, and being in line with the students' communication interests. The combination of cultural factors is to involve students in learning something that can be seen or used in the social language environment of communication. The cultural factors serve the current language communication. The cultural factors that are exposed in the text are conducive to helping students break cultural barriers in communication, and also to present the cultural elements that contemporary students enjoy seeing.

At this point, the development's preparation is more focused on the current popular themes, "Housing, education, mobile culture" and the corresponding Chinese contemporary social culture and the value of everyday life are the contents of the daily communication middle school students need to understand and the present textbooks need to be displayed. In contrast, *The new practical* is the presentation of cultural factors in the perspective of cultural induction, around its cultural factors concentrated text theme to initiate the introduction of relevant Chinese culture. For example: The theme of Volume 5 Lesson 2 is the motions drawn from Valentine's Day, and in the subsequent secondary text, through listening materials, the "Chinese Valentine's Day" - the origin of the Qixi Festival's introduction. This sort of arrangement is good in terms of fun but is somewhat inadequate in practicality. After learning in class, it is difficult for students to apply it directly to reality communication.

### 4.3 Scientific and Systematic

Scientific means that textbooks must present language that is consistent with teaching rules, accurate, standardized, and universal. Systematicity means focusing on the overall and balanced presentation of content.

Combined with cultural factors, it means that the cultural factors in textbooks must be representative and contemporary, and the distribution should be relatively balanced and have reasonable recurrence.

From the perspective of the representativeness and contemporaneity of cultural factors, *The Development* focuses more on communicative culture such as daily life and values in the presentation of cultural factors, while *The new practical* pays more attention to the history of presenting more national conditions around the theme and a culture of achievement.

From the point of view of the distribution, the cultural factors of the two sets of textbooks are not well-balanced. Referring to the statistics in the preamble, we can find that the cultural factors of the textbooks are categorically unbalanced, the material culture that represents the national culture as representative of material culture is much more pervasive than the spiritual culture of the inter-cultural culture and the mental culture of ideas and ideas. This setting and preparation are not exclusive to the ability of Chinese students to develop inter-lingual skills.

Judging from the recurrence situation, the cultural factors in the two sets of textbooks are not deliberately reviewed. Because the cultural factors are not regarded as independent textbook units. The appearance is only dependent on the presentation of other units. Therefore, there is no scientific principle to be reviewed in a single textbook, but some texts tend to be the key points reviewed in exercises, for example, "Beijing, the Great Wall, the Forbidden City" and other basic national conditions and culture. This kind of cultural point belongs to the most basic. The cultural factors have been understood as early as the primary stage or before learners are exposed to Chinese, so the significance of recurrence is not obvious.

## 4.4 Summary

The two sets of textbooks are in line with the targeting principle in terms of the presentation of the cultural factors of the intermediate level. The number and category of cultural factors presented reflect the stage characteristics of the medium-stage textbooks, which can increase the number and depth of the culture points with the elevation of the learning stage.

In terms of practicality and interestingness, *The development* has benefited from the popularity and popularity of the choice of topics, The cultural factors involved are mostly close to social contexts and have a strong practicality; *The new practical* focuses on the themes of cultural factors background, through learning to master the relevant cultural factors, although interesting but practicality is lacking.

On the scientific side, the cultural aspects of *The development* are mostly contemporary and representative cultural elements, while some of the cultural elements of *The new practical* are concentrated in cultural knowledge itself. The cultural factors of the two sets of textbooks show a general lack of balance and lack of cultural factors in the categories of communication activities and ideas.

## 5. Recommendations for the Preparation of Cultural Elements of Textbooks

### 5.1 The Selection of Cultural Factors Must Be Scientifically Reasonable

When selecting the cultural factors to be presented in the teaching textbooks, first is to pay attention to the balance of the selection of contents, to combine the scientific and reasonable selection of cultural factors for foreign Chinese teaching objectives. What's more, we cannot be confined to the scope of knowledge culture, and ignore the cultural elements of communication culture and the spiritual level. In the subsequent compilation, we should adequately increase the proportion of communicative culture and ideological culture, by the cultural teaching principle of transforming cultural knowledge into communicative skills.

In addition, a balance is also reflected in the introduction of geographical culture. *The development* and *The new practical* as representatives of the comprehensive textbooks, should pay more attention to the integrated presentation of cultural factors. Besides, we may appropriately add some cultural elements that showcase the various regions of China, to fully demonstrate the diversity of Chinese culture, and to conform to the wide use of textbooks trends.

Above analysis, we believe that more consideration should be given to the selection of text material. The text of the text material should not be selected from the book as a whole but can be adapted to texts designed by some editors themselves or in contemporary common languages. The subject matter can be consciously focused on communicative cultures, such treatment helps to increase the diversity and balance of cultural elements in the material.

*5.2 Cultural Factors to Focus on System Reproduction*

Language is the carrier of culture, and to use a language skillfully, it is necessary to understand the culture behind it. Since cultural elements appeared in the preparation of the text, and couldn't be avoided, they should be treated as the content of teaching, in the programming with an emphasis on systematic and regularity. Of course, we cannot take over and replace language teaching with cultural teaching. However after teachers have dealt with some of the cultural elements related to language in the class, it is very necessary to systematically reproduce those elements in the next lesson. We believe that the reproduction of cultural elements does not require deliberate texts and contexts, and can only be placed in the practice of reproducing them as language complement so that it is beneficial to both the replication of operational and cultural elements and not to occupy the scope of the textbooks.

*5.3 The Selection of Cultural Content to be Practical and Interesting*

On the other hand, the principle of cultural teaching requires Chinese teaching to transform cultural knowledge into communication skills, which requires the textbooks to pay attention to the practicality in the selection of cultural factors, reducing the simplicity of culture. For example, teachers may encounter the word "Kui", which refers to the "Twenty-Eight Lunar Mansions" in the traditional culture, in the name of a "Wang Kui" person in the textbook. The design of this kind of cultural factor can be said to be reasonable in terms of fun, but it is not practical and makes it more difficult for teachers to teach and students to learn. This kind of cultural factor only needs to be extended to the naming culture of the Chinese people, so that students can see the Chinese people in communication and understand the expectations behind it. It is enough to take into account both fun and practicality. It does not need to be as excessively promoting cultural knowledge as in cultural textbooks.

*5.4 The Cultural Components of the Textbooks Must Be Organized With Intercultural Awareness*

In the analysis of these two sets of materials, there are few comparisons between different cultures, with only a few individual names belonging to other language cultures. This layout design is not conducive to the use of the material as an international Chinese language textbook. Language can serve as a medium of culture but does not represent the language of purpose to learn only to reach the culture of the target language. Targeted arrangement of cultural factors in textbooks and comparison of different cultures can help students better understand the target language culture and enhance intercultural communication abilities. In particular, some ideological concepts and cultures that easily cause prejudice and barriers can eliminate barriers to a large extent and enhance understanding through comparison.

## 6. Conclusion

"Language is the carrier of culture, Chinese language teaching will inevitably accompany cultural education, and Chinese teaching cannot be separated from cultural education. Especially because of the cultural differences existing in different nations and different countries, it is necessary to pay attention to cross-cultural communication issues, and Chinese teachers also need to have a cultural mind."[9] At present, "to spread the voice of China, to tell a good story of China" is one of the important tasks of cultural communication and international Chinese teaching. As an important carrier of teaching content, Chinese language textbooks are especially important for the cultural elements to be properly organized and adapted to the times. A more rational scientific set-up of cultural factors not only contributes to the teaching and learning of teachers but also contributes greatly to the further deepening of the international awareness of China and the Chinese.

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