

# The Childlike Manifestation and Dissemination Mechanism of French Life Philosophy: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis Based on "Kamelott the Chicken" and "A Bear Named Ate and a Mouse Named Sena"

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**Abstract.** Against the backdrop of globalization, French children's literature has achieved effective cross-cultural communication by virtue of its unique *Art de vivre* concept, yet its internal mechanism remains to be explored. Taking *Carmela the Chicken* and *Ernest & Celestine* as cases, this study adopts multimodal discourse analysis and cultural communication theories to dissect the childish construction strategies of the French lifestyle concept from three meaning dimensions: representation, interaction, and composition. The study finds that the two works transform abstract cultural concepts into concrete childish narratives through the collaborative operation of multimodal symbols. At the representational level, they construct a "French picture" via the artisticization of life details; at the interactional level, they establish emotional connections from a de-adult-centered perspective; at the compositional level, they guide cultural identity through visual grammar. This "soft landing" communication strategy effectively reduces "cultural discount" and provides practical references for the cross-cultural communication of Chinese children's cultural products.

**Keywords:** French lifestyle concept, traditional French culture, children's literature, cross-cultural communication, multimodal discourse.

## 1. Introduction

In the era of advancing globalization and cultural diversification, children's cultural products such as picture books and animations have gone beyond pure entertainment to become vital carriers of cross-cultural exchange. As the "first window" for children to access the world, these products break through linguistic and geographical barriers with vivid and intuitive forms, conveying the customs, values, and lifestyles of different countries to global audiences. Taking France as an example, statistics show that France is the third-largest copyright exporter after the United Kingdom and the United States, with hundreds of its children's books imported into the Chinese market annually. Classic images such as *The Little Prince* and *Barbapapa* remain bestsellers after decades, demonstrating strong cultural vitality.

Behind this phenomenon lies the question of how information is transmitted and takes root in different cultural soils. The American anthropologist Edward Hall proposed in *The Silent Language* (1959) that "culture is communication," pointing out that culture itself is a way of communication through which people interact via "silent languages" such as time and space[1]. He distinguished cultures into high-context and low-context cultures (Hall, 1976): in high-context cultures, meaning heavily relies on context, social roles, and internalized implicit rules with implicit and euphemistic expression; in low-context cultures, information is mainly transmitted through explicit verbal coding with direct and overt expression[2]. Although France is classified as a high-context culture, its children's literary works often break through this limitation and effectively reach readers' hearts.

France is world-renowned for its profound humanistic tradition and unique *Art de vivre*. Throughout the long history of French children's literature, from Charles Perrault's classic fairy tales to Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*, there runs a conscious cultural mission: to subtly convey the French nation's aesthetic taste, critical spirit, and life philosophy while delighting children's body and mind.

The "French lifestyle concept" refers to a cultural construct that weaves social norms, aesthetic ideals, and identity into the micro-practices of daily life (Forlini, 2024)[3]. The concept discussed in this paper refers to a cultural temperament integrated into daily life, manifested in attention to culinary art, cherishing of leisure time, and advocacy of personalized expression. In the 21st century, impacted by digital media and intertwined with multiculturalism, maintaining the vitality of traditional culture among young generations and making it understood globally has become a common challenge for all countries. French children's cultural creation provides an inspiring path: deeply integrating profound cultural connotations with light and lively "childishness." This "soft landing" strategy avoids cultural barriers caused by rigid preaching and endows traditional culture with contemporary tension.

Therefore, an in-depth study of how French children's literature achieves such "childish" cultural integration and communication not only helps analyze the internal mechanism of the enduring influence of French culture but also provides a reference for China, which also boasts rich traditional cultural resources. Especially under the strategic background of promoting Chinese culture to "go global," it is of great practical significance to explore how to create excellent works that have national characteristics, conform to contemporary children's aesthetics, and are accepted by the international market.

Current academic research on French children's culture mostly focuses on classic philosophical fairy tales such as *The Little Prince*, emphasizing literary and ideological analysis. However, there is a lack of systematic multimodal research on best-selling works such as *Carmela the Chicken* and *Ernest & Celestine*, which dominate the market and profoundly shape contemporary children's life cognition. Based on this, this study aims to explore the core question: how do French children's literary works transform abstract French lifestyle concepts into texts that are loved by children and achieve effective cross-cultural communication through the collaborative operation of multimodal symbols?

## **2. Literature Review and Analytical Framework**

### **2.1. Research on Children's Literature from the Perspective of Multimodal Discourse Analysis**

Multimodal discourse analysis originates from the tradition of systemic functional linguistics. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) transformed Halliday's three metafunctions of language into three meanings for image analysis: representational, interactive, and compositional meanings, laying the foundation for visual grammar[4]. Zhang Delu (2009) expanded the theory of intermodal relations, classifying image-text and sound-image relations into complementary and non-complementary relations[5]. Chen Fenghua and Liu Chunhua (2017) emphasized the role of multimodal collaboration in meaning construction[6].

Based on the above theoretical foundation, the visual grammar proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) can be elaborated from three meaning dimensions. Representational meaning corresponds to Halliday's ideational function, focusing on how images present the world, including narrative representation (presenting actions and events) and conceptual representation (presenting categories and structures). In children's works, representational meaning involves the visual construction of characters, scenes, and other elements. Interactive meaning corresponds to the interpersonal function, focusing on how images establish the relationship between the viewer and the image world, realized through contact, distance, perspective, modality, and other dimensions. In children's works, interactive meaning determines the way of emotional connection between readers and characters. Compositional meaning corresponds to the textual function, focusing on how images achieve overall layout through information value, salience, and framing. In children's works, compositional meaning guides children's visual attention and meaning interpretation order. Semiotics is the theoretical foundation of multimodal discourse analysis, emphasizing that images, sounds, and texts are all social signs whose selection and combination are constrained by social and cultural contexts[4].

In the field of picture book and animation research, Nikolajeva and Scott (2006) applied a multimodal perspective to analyze various modes of image-text interaction in picture books—symmetry, complementarity, opposition, and enhancement—providing a typological tool for image-text co-narration[7]. Undheim and Hoel (2016) pointed out that animation narration relies on the "dynamic image mode," where static image sequences produce motion illusions through combination and construct meaning collaboratively with sound, language, and other modes[8]. Unsworth (2024) conducted a comparative study of picture books and animated films and found that animation adaptation reconstructs readers' interpretive possibilities, prompting attention to meaning reconstruction brought by media transformation[9]. Zhang Yige (2022) analyzed urban image promotional videos using visual grammar, and its analytical path from representational meaning to interactive meaning and then to compositional meaning provides an operable framework for multimodal analysis of dynamic images[10]. Zhao Xueqian (2022) applied multimodal analysis to the context of cross-cultural communication, emphasizing the role of multimodal discourse in constructing cultural images[11].

Based on the above theoretical framework, this study uses visual grammar to analyze how the picture book *Carmela the Chicken* and the animation *Ernest & Celestine* present the French lifestyle concept through multimodal symbols. At the representational meaning level, it analyzes how French rural farm scenes and family dinner images in *Carmela the Chicken* construct the image of "French rural life," and how the spatial contrast between the bear country above ground and the mouse country underground, street corner bakeries, and other scenes in *Ernest & Celestine* present the style of "French urban life." At the interactive meaning level, it analyzes how the two works establish emotional connections between child audiences and French characters through perspective selection, distance control, and modality setting to reduce cultural distance. At the compositional meaning level, it analyzes how the double-page layout of *Carmela the Chicken* guides the reading order, and how the shot composition of *Ernest & Celestine* strengthens the transmission of French aesthetic concepts through information value, salience, and other means.

## 2.2. Cultural Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation of Children's Literature

Cultural identity is the core proposition of cross-cultural communication of children's literature, referring to an individual's sense of belonging to a specific culture. In the transnational communication context, works must maintain their national cultural characteristics while providing an accessible meaning space for target readers. Hall's (1976) high- and low-context culture theory points out that France, as a representative of high-context culture, its *Art de vivre* relies on self-evident cultural tacit understanding[2]. When these contents enter low-context cultures, meaning loss occurs due to the lack of shared context, namely the "cultural discount" phenomenon. To address this dilemma, localization strategies make foreign cultural products gain cultural proximity by adjusting narrative methods, visual styles, and linguistic expressions.

From the perspective of children's literature narratology, Nikolajeva and Scott (2006) systematically analyzed various modes of image-text interaction in picture books—symmetry, complementarity, opposition, and enhancement—providing a typological tool for understanding how images and texts construct meaning together[7]. Undheim and Hoel (2023) further pointed out that animation narration relies on the "dynamic image mode," where static image sequences produce motion illusions through combination and construct meaning collaboratively with sound, language, and other modes[8]. On this basis, Zhao and Zhuang (2025) extracted three audience adaptation mechanisms from the Korean animation adaptation of *Journey to the West*—audio-visual anchoring, hierarchical symbolic meaning assignment, and strategic modal interaction—and found that the animation version creates cognitive support for child audiences through strategies such as vocabulary simplification, syntactic adjustment, and narrative scaffolding, providing a methodological reference for analyzing the cross-cultural adaptation of French children's works[12].

From the semiotic and multimodal perspective, Xie Qin (2020) pointed out that symbols generate emotional resonance by acting on audiences, and the communication of the French lifestyle concept

is essentially a process of symbolic meaning reproduction[13]. Cai Shaoshuo, Deng Xinxing, and Du Nannan (2023) further proposed an analytical framework of "metaphorical design of communication content under representational function, communication distance setting under subjective interactive meaning, and communication information expression under compositional meaning," providing a systematic tool for cultural communication research in the multimodal context. However, cross-cultural adaptation is not a value-neutral transformation process[14]. Otaif (2025)'s multimodal analysis of the animation *The Ugly Duckling* revealed ideological risks: the English translated version has nearly four times more expressions related to "ugliness" than the original Danish work, and the animation strengthens the meaning construction of social exclusion through visual elements. This finding warns that the "cultural filtering" phenomenon in cross-cultural communication may lead to the deviation of the original values, requiring prudence in adaptation practice[15].

Based on the above theoretical framework, this study will analyze three levels: at the cultural identity level, analyze how the two works construct "Frenchness" recognizable and acceptable to overseas readers through the selection and coding of French cultural symbols; at the cultural discount level, explore how childish narration reduces the understanding barriers of French high-context cultural content in cross-cultural communication; at the localization strategy level, examine whether there are localization adjustments in the communication process of the two works in the Chinese market and how these strategies affect audience acceptance.

### 2.3. Case Selection and Research Status

The *Carmela the Chicken* series is written by French author Joris Chamblain and illustrated by artist Jean-Luc Fromental, with a total of 48 volumes. Since its introduction to China in 2006, it has been deeply loved by young readers. Fan Haixia (2021) pointed out that the series extensively uses intertextual techniques to weave fairy tales, historical figures and events, and artistic works together, achieving multiple functions of moral education, knowledge imparting, and aesthetic education[16]. However, current domestic research is "mostly introductory and promotional," lacking systematic research on the multimodal characteristics of image-text relations, watercolor painting style, visual construction of French rural life, and cross-cultural communication mechanisms.

The *Ernest & Celestine* series was created by Belgian painter Gabrielle Vincent and has won the international Hans Christian Andersen Award. The adapted animation won the César Award for Best Animated Feature and an Academy Award nomination for Best Animated Feature. Zhang Chunying (2017) analyzed from a narratological perspective that the film uses an animal perspective to tell the friendship between bears and mice, alluding to racial discrimination, "expressing the friendship and love between bears and mice with France's unique romanticism and rationalism," presenting a "warm watercolor painting style, strong French romance and warmth[17]." However, research systematically exploring how the series constructs the "French lifestyle concept" through visual grammar from the perspective of multimodal discourse analysis remains to be carried out.

In summary, existing research mostly focuses on the literariness of single texts, lacking in-depth investigation of cross-media comparison and multimodal symbols constructing cultural meaning.

## 3. Research Design

### 3.1. Selection of Research Methods

This study follows the qualitative research paradigm, focusing on the thick description and interpretation of meaning. It aims to deeply understand the internal cultural coding mechanism of the two works and explore how they transform abstract French lifestyle concepts into concrete childish expressions through the collaborative operation of multimodal symbols. Core questions involve the meaning generation mechanism and cultural coding process, which need to reveal internal logic through interpretive understanding.

This study adopts the multimodal discourse analysis method. Based on Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar theory, it regards picture books and animations as integral multimodal discourses and

analyzes how different symbolic modes construct meaning, express attitudes, and establish relationships individually and collaboratively.

Meanwhile, using the comparative case analysis method, this study selects the picture book *Carmela the Chicken* and the animation *Ernest & Celestine* as two independent cases. Through horizontal comparison of the similarities and differences between the two works in narrative strategies, multimodal resource allocation, and cultural presentation modes, it extracts common strategies and unique manifestations.

### 3.2. Research Objects and Corpus Selection

The selected works are typical because both are highly influential French children’s cultural products in China in recent years and clearly embody the French life philosophy. Since its introduction to China in 2006, the *Carmela the Chicken* series has published 48 volumes and is deeply loved by young readers. The adapted animation *Ernest & Celestine* has won the César Award for Best Animated Feature and an Academy Award nomination for Best Animated Feature, and also has a wide influence in China. They are complementary in media types: picture books focus on static image-text relation analysis, and animations focus on dynamic sound-image relation investigation. The combination of the two can more comprehensively cover all dimensions of multimodal discourse analysis, providing an ideal corpus for cross-media comparison.

The picture book corpus of *Carmela the Chicken* selects the most representative volumes, including *I Want to See the Sea*, *I Want a Star*, *I Want a Little Brother*, *I’m Going to Get the Sun Back*, *I Love Little Black Cat*, *I Can Beat the Monsters*, *I Want to Save Berlio*, *I Don’t Want to Be Eaten*, *I’m Not a Coward*, *I Like Her So Much*, etc., focusing on extracting cover pages, key conflict scene double pages, and pages showing French life details. The animation corpus of *Ernest & Celestine* selects the 2012 animated film version, focusing on extracting daily French life scene segments, contrast segments between the bear country above ground and the mouse country underground, and the ending reconciliation segment.

**Table 1.** Core Analytical Framework of the Study

Analysis Dimension	Core Focus	Specific Analysis Elements
Representational Meaning Analysis	Examines how images and sounds represent French life scenes and cultural symbols	Character actions, environmental settings, categorical relations
Interactive Meaning Analysis	Explores how works construct the relationship between viewers and characters and convey emotional attitudes	Perspective, distance, color
Compositional Meaning Analysis	Analyzes how information layout guides attention and highlights cultural values	Information value, salience, framing
Narrative Strategy Analysis	Focuses on how plot structure and character building serve the childish expression of cultural themes	Plot structure, character building, image-text relation, audience adaptation mechanism

## 4. Case Analysis: Multimodal Construction of the French Lifestyle Concept

### 4.1. Image-Text Interaction and Cultural Metaphor in the Picture Book *Carmela the Chicken*

#### 4.1.1 The "French Life" Picture in Visual Narrative

**Table 2.** Typical Visual Symbols in the Picture Book *Carmela the Chicken*

Symbol Category	Specific Symbols
Natural Symbols	Vast fields, wheat fields, hills, natural landscapes around farms, sea, beaches, starry sky
Traditional Cultural Symbols	Primitive farms, rural chicken coops, lively markets, castles, churches, medieval squares, festival celebrations
Historical and Artistic Symbols	Columbus's discovery of the New World ( <i>I Want to See the Sea</i> ), Montgolfier brothers' hot air balloon ( <i>I'm Going to Get the Sun Back</i> ), Galileo's astronomical telescope ( <i>I Want a Star</i> ), composition reference to Munch's <i>The Scream</i> ( <i>I Want a Little Brother</i> ), French fairy tale <i>Little Thumb</i> ( <i>I Want a Little Brother</i> ), Puss in Boots ( <i>I Love Little Black Cat</i> ), "Knight of the Lake" Lancelot du Lac ( <i>I Can Beat the Monsters</i> ), Louis XIV ( <i>I Want to Save Berlio</i> ), <i>The Story of Reynard the Fox</i> ( <i>I Don't Want to Be Eaten</i> ), <i>Liberty Leading the People</i> ( <i>I'm Not a Coward</i> ), <i>The Lady and the Unicorn</i> ( <i>I Like Her So Much</i> )
Character Symbols	Carmela (adventurous little hen), Pidoc (red rooster from the Americas), Carmenedo (pink chick inheriting the adventurous spirit), Carmen (smart younger sister), Berlio (little sheep friend), Perro the cormorant (storyteller), Columbus, Galileo, Montgolfier brothers (historical figures)

At the representational meaning level, the picture book systematically screens and reconstructs French cultural elements. Instead of attempting to present a complete picture of French society and history, the author extracts highly recognizable cultural symbols such as castles, churches, farms, medieval squares, and hot air balloons, and transforms them into aesthetic elements of the "French lifestyle" understandable to children through "de-historicization." For example, castles in the picture book are no longer carriers of the feudal system but backgrounds for chicks to adventure and save partners; *Liberty Leading the People* is no longer a historical painting commemorating the French July Revolution but a spiritual symbol for chicks to bravely resist and protect their homes. This symbol screening mechanism frees French culture from historical heaviness and enters children's cognitive world in an acceptable aesthetic form.

At the compositional meaning level, the picture book guides children's visual attention through double-page layout. The author controls the reader's viewing path and information reception order through the distribution position, spatial sequence, and visual salience design of picture elements, making the double-page not only a presentation of narrative scenes but also a visual mechanism for meaning generation. In *I'm Going to Get the Sun Back*, the author uses a double page to depict the scene of small animals taking off in a hot air balloon. It adopts a vertical sequential composition, showing the process of the hot air balloon from preparation to high altitude through three sub-shots successively. In terms of information value distribution, the hot air balloons are arranged from bottom to top: the lower part corresponds to the preparation stage, and the upper part corresponds to the realization of ideals and innovative spirit, completely presenting the narrative process of "dream comes true" through vertical sequence. In terms of salience, the three hot air balloons change from large to small and from solid to virtual, forming a visual rhythm that guides the reader's line of sight to move from bottom to top and experience the dynamic process of ascent. Through this compositional strategy, the creator transforms cultural symbols with historical depth into aesthetic experiences perceptible to children, guiding children to naturally establish cognition of the story logic and theme during reading.

#### 4.1.2 Implantation of Values: From "Rebellion" to "Exploration"

The core narrative mode of *Carmela the Chicken* is "protagonist rebellion—encounter adventure—gain growth," embodying the French cultural advocacy of individualism and exploration spirit.

Take the key double page of Carmela climbing over mountains and ridges to find the sea in *I Want to See the Sea* as an example: the text describes Carmela's arduous journey to find the sea, while the illustration is divided into three sub-shots occupying the entire page, from a single cold-toned lightning and hills to a saturated warm-toned depiction of the rising sun and the magnificent sea. Carmela stands on the hillside, looking excitedly at the sea she has long dreamed of.

From a multimodal perspective, the text constructs a "closed" narrative reality that attempts to limit action possibilities; the image constructs an "open" visual space through high-saturation colors, forming a strong image-text contrast. The picture adopts a horizontal perspective, placing child readers on an equal position with Carmela; the transition from cold to warm tones creates the hardships and length of the journey as well as a positive emotional atmosphere.

This image-text asymmetry reflects the French cultural advocacy of individualism and adventurous spirit. The work uses the more impactful mode of images to deconstruct the conservative authority represented by texts, conveying the French life philosophy of "dare to question the status quo and bravely pursue dreams" to child readers. Carmela's "rebellion" is recoded as a positive "exploration" spirit in the narrative, which is a childish expression of the concept of freedom in French culture.

## **4.2. Sound-Image Symphony and Inclusive Culture in the Animation *Ernest & Celestine***

### **4.2.1 "Class" Narrative of Color and Light and Shadow**

The film constructs a class narrative between the bear country above ground and the mouse country underground through the contrast of color and light and shadow. The bear country above ground adopts dark brown tones, rough lines, and heavy composition, with power institutions such as courts and police stations occupying prominent positions; the mouse country underground adopts warm yellow tones, delicate watercolor texture, and warm composition, with living spaces such as families and bakeries as the visual center. This visual contrast metaphorizes class differences.

More profoundly, there is internal power operation in both worlds. The candy store and dental store in the bear country form an interest chain—the candy store owner smiles at customers but scolds his son to go to the dental clinic run by his mother opposite, satirizing the hypocritical nature of capitalist society. In the orphanage of the mouse country, Grandma Mouse instills the story of "big evil bears eating mice" into children day after day, maintaining racial separation through fear. This class narrative is a visual expression of the "equality" concept in French culture.

### **4.2.2 Cross-Border Friendship: The Concrete Embodiment of French "Fraternity" Spirit**

The core narrative of the film is the cross-species friendship between Ernest and Celestine, a childish presentation of the French "fraternity" spirit. As Zhang Chunying pointed out, the film "expresses the friendship and love between bears and mice with France's unique romanticism and rationalism" (2017)[17].

The court trial scene centrally shows the absurd nature of prejudice. In the bear court, the bear judge asks Celestine if she scared the bear mother; the bear mothers originally want to shake their heads to deny, but are forced to pretend to be frightened under the orders of the bear fathers; in the mouse court, the mouse judge asks Ernest if he scared the mouse children; the children shake their heads innocently but are forced to nod by the dean. This symmetrical scene shows that the so-called "victim's fear" does not stem from real harm but from a product constructed by power relations—the strong need fear to maintain opposition and thus create evidence of fear through forced performance.

The ending reconciliation segment is more profound. When the court catches fire, the "civilized people" in gorgeous clothes only care about escaping, while Ernest and Celestine, regarded as aliens, return to the fire to save the judge. The judge asks Celestine what she wants to do most, and Celestine says "want to be with bears"; the judge laughs and says "that's a ridiculous idea," and Celestine retorts "but don't you live with bears too?" leaving the judge speechless. This ending implies that prejudice is not an insurmountable natural divide but a cognitive cage constructed; only returning to true emotions and intuitions can break it.

From the interactive meaning perspective, the film shortens the distance between the audience and characters through a head-up perspective, creates an emotional atmosphere with warm yellow tones and piano music, and concretizes the abstract "fraternity" concept into perceptible emotional experience. The friendship between Ernest and Celestine is not only a connection of personal emotions but also a symbol of class reconciliation, a contemporary inheritance of the French concepts of "liberty, equality, fraternity."

### **4.3. Comparison and Synthesis: The Childish Communication Mechanism of French Culture**

#### **4.3.1 Media Differences: Static "Blank Space" and Dynamic "Immersion"**

The picture book adopts a "blank space" strategy. *Carmela the Chicken* creates imaginative space between images and texts. The page-turning rhythm itself is a meaning generation mechanism: the suspense on the previous page is revealed after turning the page, leaving room for readers to think and imagine. The tension between images and texts stimulates readers' active thinking and cultivates children's critical thinking.

The animation adopts an "immersion" strategy. *Ernest & Celestine* creates an immersive emotional experience through multimodal collaboration. Continuous editing, sound-image synchronization, and camera movement wrap the audience in the story world, strengthening emotional resonance.

The two strategies have their own advantages: the picture book "blank space" is suitable for conveying values requiring independent thinking such as "freedom" and "critical spirit"; the animation "immersion" is suitable for conveying values requiring emotional resonance such as "fraternity" and "inclusiveness."

#### **4.3.2 Common Strategies: Artistic Presentation of Life Details and De-Adult-Centered Narration**

Both works use the artisticization of life details to transform daily life details into artistic cultural symbols. Family dinners and farm life in *Carmela the Chicken* are endowed with poetry through watercolor style; bakeries and cafes in *Ernest & Celestine* are sublimated into symbols of "French art de vivre." This artistic treatment codes "Frenchness" into visual symbols such as baguettes, open-air cafes, and accordion music, which precipitate into anchors of cultural identity through repetition.

Both works adopt de-adult-centered narration, placing children in the narrative subject position. In *Carmela the Chicken*, the protagonists are chicks, and the real actors are "rebels" like Carmela. In *Ernest & Celestine*, Ernest and Celestine are equal partners rather than authoritative and obedient relationships. This narrative aligns with the critical spirit of authority in French culture.

From cross-case comparison, three common mechanisms can be extracted. First, visualization of metaphors: transforming abstract concepts such as "freedom," "equality," and "fraternity" into concrete and perceptible visual symbols. Second, gamification of life scenes: endowing daily activities with narrative tension to make cultural learning a happy game. Third, decentralization of authority: dissolving traditional hierarchical order through children's perspective and conveying the critical spirit that "everyone has the right to question."

The collaborative operation of these three mechanisms makes the French lifestyle concept no longer an abstract sermon but an experienceable and recognizable cultural gene, implanted into the spiritual world of child readers in a childish way.

## **5. Conclusion**

The study finds that French children's literature realizes the soft transmission of culture through the collaborative operation of multimodal symbols. At the representational meaning level, the picture book screens and reconstructs French cultural symbols, transforming historical elements such as castles, hot air balloons, and famous paintings into fairy tale backgrounds understandable to children, attaching abstract cultural concepts to specific visual images. At the interactive meaning level, eye contact and postures of characters in images shorten the emotional distance between characters and

readers, making child readers generate a sense of substitution and empathy during viewing. At the compositional meaning level, the double-page layout guides children's viewing path through the position distribution and visual rhythm of elements, transforming narrative logic into spatial sequence and helping children naturally establish cognition of the story theme. The joint effect of the three dimensions helps children subtly understand French culture during reading.

Transforming abstract concepts into childish narratives is an effective path for cultural communication. *Carmela the Chicken* codes the spirit of individualism into the adventurous journey of Carmela the chicken "I want to see the sea," attaching the values of pursuing self and daring to explore to specific story plots. Child readers subtly accept this cultural concept while following Carmela's footsteps. *Ernest & Celestine* concretizes the spirit of fraternity into cross-species friendship between bears and mice, presenting the absurdity of prejudice and the purity of emotions through scenes such as court trials and fire rescue, making child readers understand the values of equality and inclusiveness through emotional resonance, thus reducing cultural discount.

Static picture books and dynamic animations have their own advantages in cultural communication. The image-text "blank space" of picture books provides space for children's imagination and thinking. The gap between text and image needs to be actively filled by readers, which strengthens children's cognition and internalization of cultural symbols. The sound-image "immersion" of animations creates a more immersive viewing experience through the comprehensive effect of music, dialogue, color, and movement, making it easier for children to accept heterogeneous cultures through emotional resonance. The common feature of both is: artistically presenting life details to attach culture to daily scenes; adopting a de-adult-centered narrative perspective to make children the subject of the story rather than passive educated objects, thus forming an effective mechanism for the cross-cultural communication of French children's literature.

The above research findings have practical implications for Chinese children's cultural products to "go global." Current domestic works often fall into the misunderstandings of "excessive preaching" or "symbol stacking." Drawing on French experience, Chinese children's cultural products can shift to a "life narrative" path, embedding cultural elements such as solar terms, food, festivals, and etiquette into the daily life scenes of children's stories, making them part of the narrative rather than rigid labels; meanwhile, abandoning adult-centered presuppositions, attaching culture to children's curiosity and imagination, and entering the emotional world of foreign children in an aesthetic way.

This study also has certain limitations to be expanded in follow-up research. First, the number of research cases is small, and the universality of the conclusions needs to be verified by more genre works. Second, it does not fully pay attention to the interaction mechanisms of new media forms such as video games, interactive picture books, and children's animation series. Third, it lacks empirical investigation of audience acceptance. Follow-up research can expand samples, introduce interdisciplinary perspectives, and deepen exploration through questionnaire surveys, focus interviews, and other methods to deepen the understanding of cross-cultural communication mechanisms of children's cultural products from the audience perspective.

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