

# On the mechanism of empathy in the construction of "lovely Chinese image"——Taking the overwhelming popularity of Bing Dwen Dwen as the example

**Tong Shuting**

*School of Art, West Anhui University, Lu'an, China*

**Abstract:** "Lovely China" provides an important epistemology, methodology and practical theory for displaying a real, three-dimensional and comprehensive China. Telling China's stories and spreading Chinese voice is an imperative starting point. The image of Lovely China has rich connotations, and it is of great practical significance to shape and spread the image of Lovely China. This study will start from the explosion phenomenon of Bing Dwen Dwen, the relationship between empathy and the construction of the image of cute China, and analyze how empathy theory is used in the construction of the image of lovely China, which will help to have a better acknowledge of the construction of the image of lovely China, which can also provide some new ideas for the dissemination of Chinese culture.

**Keywords:** empathy communication; lovely China; Bing Dwen Dwen; cultural symbols

## 1. Introduction

With the convening of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, the mascot Bing Dwen Dwen quickly became popular on the Internet, and it has been one of the trending topics for long time on social media, and many official media as well as Self-Media were vying for it. Reporting on it, its peripheral products have triggered a wave of "all-people panic buying". In the early hours of the morning, there was a long queue at the entrance of the Beijing Winter Olympics souvenir shop to buy *Bing Dwen Dwen*, and the online stores also experienced a situation of "once it was put on the shelves, it was sold out instantly", and even pushed manufacturers to start work ahead of schedule to increase the product offerings. Besides, *Bing Dwen Dwen* is also very fashionable abroad. The content of *Bing Dwen Dwen* on overseas social platforms has the most likes and downloads on Tik Tok and got the most comments on Instagram. On the Amazon platform, the *Bing Dwen Dwen* keychain has become the top-selling product of women's keychain. Obviously, "Bing Dwen Dwen" has been welcomed by the public both at home and abroad, and the international public has also felt and learned about the lovely China through Bing Dwen Dwen.

## 2. Overview of empathy

"Empathy" comes from psychology. It is not an emotion or a feeling, but it refers to a person's ability to understand another person's unique emotion accurately and then respond to it.<sup>[2]</sup> Empathy is an innate ability rooted in human genetic talents. Mencius, Gaozi Shang records, "The taste of the mouth is the same as the taste; the sound of the ear is the same as the hearing; the eye is also of the color, there is the same beauty." ,which means that the taste of the mouth, the sound that the ear can hear, and the color that the eye sees, are all the same. Human beings have a physiological "common sense" in smell, hearing and vision. Such idioms as "Do not do to others what you would not want others to do to you", "compassionate heart", "put one's feet in someone's shoes", "love can't help", "empathize with oneself" are also the embodiment of the sympathy of traditional Chinese culture. Some scholars have pointed out that the common emotions of human beings can eliminate the boundaries of countries and cultures and then connect "self" and "other". American sociologist Jonathan Turner believes that emotions are the "glue" that connect people. It can be seen that empathy can transcend the boundaries of countries and nations, and it will not be erased due to regional and cultural differences. The shaping of the image of lovely China is also inseparable from the spread of empathy. It is finding a breakthrough in empathy communication based on the lovely panda image that created the Bing Dwen Dwen's appearance, and the motivation for lovely things is the empathy footnote of little help brings much return.

### 3. Relevance between the construction of cute Chinese images and empathy

In his vital speeches at the opening ceremonies of the Eleventh National Congress of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles and the Tenth Congress of the Chinese Writers Association, General Secretary Xi Jinping put forward five hopes to the vast number of literary and art workers. The fourth hope is to tell Chinese stories with love and strength, and show the world a credible, lovely and respectable China.

#### 3.1. *Lovely Chinese images*

The so-called "lovely" means to be liked, to be adored, and to be deeply loved. In different contexts, "cute" has different meanings. The lovely image of China means that China is an attractive, lovely, and even beloved country in the eyes of international audiences.<sup>[4]</sup> The image of Lovely China has rich connotations. There are multiple dimensions to understand Lovely China. Lovely Chinese, lovely Chinese places, and lovely China jointly create a lovely image of China.

#### 3.2. *The catalytic role of empathy*

Today, in the international society characterized by "heterogeneity", whether in the field of political public opinion or international public opinion, words or symbols with empathy characteristics are more likely to attract people's attention, and are more conducive to cuteness The construction of Chinese image. For example, in the field of political and public opinion, "Xi Jinping's "Fighting Tiger" Animation: Mass Line in the Internet Age" has attracted hundreds of overseas media such as the Wall Street Journal, Singapore's Straits Times, and the British BBC to broadcast and reprint relevant reports. Many media have made positive comments on this, believing that cartoon images can give audiences a cute, beautiful and warm feeling, which enhances the tender feelings in people's hearts and is more conducive to the acceptance of the content. There are also topics such as the "Belt and Road", "open world economy", "cooperation to fight the epidemic", "co-consultation, joint construction and sharing", and "a community with a shared future for mankind", which are more likely to be widely reported by the media.<sup>[1]</sup> At the same time, in the field of international public opinion, many Chinese cultural symbols are also deeply loved by people around the world. Among them, Chinese pandas have aroused the hearts of international audiences because of their cute and cute images, and Bing Dwen Dwen's getting overwhelming popular has benefited from this; Chinese internet celebrity Li Ziqi has won wide attention for her comfortable and beautiful pastoral life in her videos, which then evoke beautiful and pleasant emotional experience and memory of international audiences. To sum up, emotion is an important "catalyst" in the whole transmission process. A successful external communication is closely related to empathy, and the introduction of "empathy" in the image construction of cute China will also have a positive effect on the image construction.

### 4. Strategy of putting "empathy" in the construction of cute Chinese images

When constructing the image of lovely China, by means of setting the content or form which is easy to induce empathy, thus the distance between different cultural subjects can be quickly shortened. The audience will become interested in the information content, gather attention resources, and then generate understanding and even deep identification. After analyzing the phenomenon of Bing Dwen Dwen's getting popular, the author believes that this kind of empathy not only includes the "emotional infection" inspired by the love of both sides for empathy symbols, but it is also inseparable from the benign dissemination of lovely China by mainstream media through "opinion selection"; at the same time, it also triggered the second spread under the "empathy concern".<sup>[5]</sup>

#### 4.1. *Empathy originating: Empathy symbols deepen identity, originated from the emotional infection of passion*

In empathy communication, how to use intermediaries to bridge different communication subjects to trigger their "shared representation" is the key link to achieve mutual "heart connection".

In the past foreign communication activities, China mainly tends to choose traditional cultural symbols such as the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, and Peking Opera, but relatively grand cultural symbols will inevitably feel alienated and distant for audiences of different cultures. What is different this time is that the mascot of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics, Bing Dwen Dwen, is based on the image

of giant pandas, which is not only "Chinese" but also "international". As we all know, the giant panda, as China's national treasure, is extremely rare and precious. It is known as the "living fossil" of the animal world. It is precise because of the consensus cultural symbol formed by the panda shape with Chinese characteristics and the characteristics of lovely, honest, peaceful and equal human empathy that Bing Dwen Dwen has reduced the public's perception of its being in different regions. Unfamiliarity quickly shortens the distance between different cultural subjects, triggers the public's emotional identity, and has become an important node for communicating with the public at home and abroad.

Duby, the executive director of the Olympic Department of the International Olympic Committee, other people at home and abroad said: "Bing Dwen Dwen is cute, humorous and full of positive energy". Bing Dwen Dwen looks like a giant panda which has just been in the snow Rolled." Not only that, but also Prince Albert II of Monaco also sought Bing Dwen Dwen for his twins; IOC President Bach praised Bing Dwen Dwen for being "really cute" in the mascot selection; delegations from various countries loved the Bing Dwen Dwen dolls in the Great Hall of the People and so on.<sup>[6]</sup>

From the description above, it can be seen that the well-known panda image has made international audiences interested in seeing, meeting, and touching Bing Dwen Dwen, which is the important medium and carrier of the "heart-to-heart communication", and also the "decisive symbol" in the empathy communication .

#### ***4.2. Empathy spreading: Mainstream media have found the “Moe Power” to promote the spread if cute***

"Moe Power" refers to the dissemination and communication activities carried out by organizations or individuals through excavating and displaying cute elements centered on "cute", through specific language, action, expression or animation, mascot and other forms, so as to achieve goodwill and win The power to support, improve image, channel emotions, etc. According to the point of view of cognitive psychology, when people come into contact with a lovely image, they will naturally produce a relaxed, friendly and pleasant emotion, which is easier to create a good visual atmosphere and public opinion atmosphere.

On September 17, 2019, Bing Dwen Dwen was officially showed to the public, and the attention was not too high at the beginning. It did not attract attention and trigger a rush to buy until after the opening ceremony of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. ", it is because the static Bing Dwen Dwen ,although being cute, it is still a cold "thing", and the enthusiasm for connecting with people is not high. During the hold of the Winter Olympics, the media report on the intimate interaction between different people and "Bing Dwen Dwen" and the pursuit of "Bing Dwen Dwen" for photos, etc., have made the public seen the dynamic anthropomorphic emotions of "Bing Dwen Dwen" and become warm "people". Among them, the report of the "Bing Dwen Dwen Propaganda Ambassador" - Japanese TV reporter Gido Tsujioka was a powerful "catalyst" for Bing Dwen Dwen popularity. On February 2, 2022, when the morning program of Nippon TV was broadcast, the host of the program contacted Gido Tsujioka to introduce the situation of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. There is no more information, but he has news about Bing Dwen Dwen. In the video, Gido Tsujioka slowly unzipped his shirt with a proud face, revealing the work card lanyard with 6 Bing Dwen Dwen badges hanging on it. This video quickly became popular on the Internet. Gido Tsujioka's enthusiasm was extremely contagious, and his exaggerated and cute reaction also aroused the emotional resonance of netizen, setting off a heated discussion on the topic of Bing Dwen Dwen. These things with "meo power" have accelerated the popularity of Bing Dwen Dwen and the passion to buy one.

Peoples Daily published an article on February 7 saying that why is Bing Dwen Dwen so lovely and beloved? Xinhua News Agency on February 9 : Feel the cute China through "Bing Dwen Dwen"; Xinhua News Agency on February 22 follows "Bing Dwen Dwen" to watch the Winter Olympics: here is lovely China. To sum up, the mainstream media often use the word "lovely" when reporting on Bing Dwen Dwen, and the lovely image of Bing Dwen Dwen also leaves a deep memory in people's hearts. Lovely communication is one of the empathy communications, and lovely communication contains powerful cuteness power. These things with "Meo Power" have accelerated the Bing Dwen Dwen's overwhelming popularity and the image of lovely China into the hearts of people.

#### ***4.3. Empathy mobilizing: The attention paid on empathy motivates the secondary creation, builds an emotional community***

On Feb 20, 2022, a million Bing Dwen Dwen were put on sale at the official Tmall Olympic flagship

store on time, and all the products sold out that night. While in foreign countries, Bing Dwen Dwen is also sold out at a high price on second-hand platforms. It can be seen that with the explosion of Bing Dwen Dwen, both at home and abroad, there has been a "hard to find one" phenomenon<sup>[7]</sup>. In response to their love for Bing Dwen Dwen, netizens have begun to spontaneously create a second version of Bing Dwen Dwen, using paintbrushes, clay and even orange peels, both to cheer for the Winter Olympics and to ease their own or others' desire for Bing Dwen Dwen. As a result, a trend of "Bing Dwen Dwen's second creation" has emerged on social media, bringing about the extension of larger social contacts. Whether at home or abroad, whether journalists, athletes or ordinary audiences, the love for Bing Dwen Dwen has narrowed the emotional gap between different individuals and established an emotion community. While the international audience is getting to know the lovely Bing Dwen Dwen, they are also getting to know the lovely Chinese and the lovely China.

## 5. Enlightenment of "Empathy" on the construction of the image of lovely China

To enhance the affinity of China's image and create a lovely image of China, we cannot do without the communication of empathy in various fields and types.

### 5.1. Construct cultural symbols of empathy and realize cultural identity

Due to cultural differences between different countries, cultural discounts and meaning distortions will inevitably occur in different cultures in the process of encoding and decoding symbols. For example, China tends to use the representative symbols of traditional history and culture in the past foreign communication activities, such as traditional Chinese medicine, drama, calligraphy, etc., which can show the profound heritage of Chinese culture, but for audiences who do not know the relevant cultural background, the image of China conveyed by these symbols has a sense of distance. Therefore, while promoting local culture, we must uphold an attitude of equal dialogue with other cultural subjects, consider from the perspective of other cultures, and deeply explore the common meaning space between different cultures. Mr. Fei Xiaotong, a famous sociologist, summed up a standard of behavior for dealing with the relationship of different cultures, which is achieving one's goal yields gratification. Leading a head to consummate others' goal doubles satisfaction. Goals of self and others can be unified thus the world can be harmonized, and said that cultural symbols of human consensus is the criterion of endowing the connotation of empathy. The fact of Bing Dwen Dwen being widely known is because of the cultural symbols, which reflect the value of empathy between China and the west. So it can be seen that the importance of empathy symbols in the construction and external communication of lovely Chinese images.

### 5.2. Strengthen the "Moe power" and promote the spread of cuteness

The book "Moe Power: Lovely Communication Theory" points out: "Lovely communication is a communication activity carried out through cute information." We should actively build lovely China through the spread of cuteness, and make "lovely" a new business card for China. Lovely communication is a kind of empathy communication and an important way to shape the image of lovely China<sup>[4]</sup>. In addition to Bing Dwen Dwen, the 2021 Henan Satellite TV Spring Festival Gala dance work "Tang Palace Night Banquet", because of its lovely dance and the clever and eccentric performance of the dancers, once triggered a "national trend" on foreign social platforms, and won the extensive attention. Foreign netizens commented "This is amazing beauty", "I have watched it more than 10 times", "I like Chinese traditional culture so much", and spontaneously promoted it on Twitter. In the migration incident of the elephant herd in Yunnan, the soft "cute" effect is also very prominent. The elephant herd is full of cuteness, chubby and bulging. The harmonious scenes brought great entertainment to the viewers.<sup>[3]</sup> Therefore, in the construction of lovely Chinese images, we should carry out empathy communication through cute elements more actively.

## 6. Conclusions

From the research and analysis of the role of empathy theory in the construction of lovely China's image, this paper concludes that empathy communication is a crucial link in the construction of lovely China's image. Empathy communication can quickly shorten the distance between people from different cultural backgrounds, make people form a common cognition, and make the image of China in the hearts of international audiences more lovely and close. The lovely Bing Dwen Dwen is a microcosm of lovely

China. Countries around the world will increasingly feel a China where tradition and modernity are in harmony, a China that is independent and self-reliant while embracing the world with enthusiasm. Looking forward to the in-depth integration of Chinese culture and the world's expression, creating more Bing Dwen Dwen, and also hoping that we make more lovely images be popular around world to tell Chinese stories and convey Chinese voices to the world.

## References

- [1] Yu Yunquan, Zhu Wenbo. *Empathy, Commonality and Sharing: A New Approach to Enhance the International Influence of Chinese Discourse* [J]. *Modern Communication (Journal of Communication University of China)*, 2022, 44(02): 61-65 .
- [2] Zhao Xinli. *An analysis of the path of shaping the image of cute China from the perspective of empathy communication* [J]. *Modern Communication (Journal of Communication University of China)*, 2021, 43(09):69-74.
- [3] Guo Zhenzhi. *Seeing the external communication of "Lovely China" from the migration of Yunnan elephants* [J]. *External Communication*, 2021, (07): 28-30.
- [4] Zhong Xin, Jiang Xiancheng. *Improve the national international communication system and build a credible, lovely and respectable image of China* [J]. *Chinese Journalists*, 2021, (07): 38-43.
- [5] Wu Fei. *The theoretical basis and practical path exploration of empathy communication* [J]. *Journalism and Communication Research*, 2019, 26(05):59-76+127.
- [6] Jin Xiaolin. *Analysis of the reasons for the popularity of Bing Dwen Dwen from the perspective of cross-cultural communication* [J]. *China Prefectural Journalist*, 2022, (04): 31-33.
- [7] Xue Ke, Gu Jiayu, Chen Binglin. *Empathy, Innovation and Integration: The Construction of Cultural Symbols and National Discourse System—Analysis of Social Media Platform Content Based on "Bingdundun"* [J]. *News and Writing*, 2022, ( 05):35-45.