Cross-cultural Communication Strategies of Chinese Traditional Culture from the Perspective of the Cultural Identity: A Case Study of *Seasons of China*

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Abstract: In the context of globalization, cultural exchanges between countries have become increasingly close, making the exploration of cross-cultural communication strategies for traditional Chinese culture significantly important. This paper analyzes the embodiment of cultural identity in the documentary Seasons of China from three dimensions of cultural identity: cognitive identity, emotional identity, and behavioral identity. Specifically, Seasons of China enhances the audience's cognitive identity by adopting a foreign perspective, evokes emotional identity by using objects that embody shared values, and awakens behavioral identity by focusing on festival rituals. Finally, this paper proposes cross-cultural communication strategies for traditional Chinese culture from the perspective of cultural identity, including utilizing diverse information dissemination platforms to strengthen cognitive identity, fully leveraging traditional culture to evoke emotional identity, and organizing relevant activities to awaken behavioral identity. These strategies aim to provide valuable references and insights for the cross-cultural communication of traditional Chinese culture.

Keywords: cross-cultural communication; cultural identity; traditional Chinese culture

1. Introduction

As globalization continues to deepen, cultural exchanges among nations are becoming increasingly frequent. Globalization has extended the reach of human activities from individual nations to various parts of the world. Consequently, the collision and amalgamation of diverse cultures among nations have commenced, rendering global cultural communication an undeniable social reality. China, as one of the world's major countries, inevitably experiences the influence of global cultural communication. Traditional Chinese culture, serving as the foundation of Chinese cultural heritage, stands as one of the carriers through which China shows its charm to the world. Under the background of cultural globalization, bolstering China's international influence necessitates the promotion of traditional Chinese culture.

However, as the prevailing global cultural communication paradigm is characterized by "western dominance, others subordinate ", many nations exhibit a lack of understanding of Chinese traditional culture and even harbor prejudices against it [1][2][3]. Hence, it is significant to identify effective cross-cultural communication methods to foster mutual understanding among heterogeneous cultures. Currently, some domestic scholars have undertaken comprehensive research on Chinese cultural communication strategies. The majority of these studies primarily delve into the predicaments and strategies of international communication of Chinese culture within the framework of globalization [4][5]. Nevertheless, there is a dearth of studies on the cross-cultural communication strategies of traditional Chinese culture grounded in the theory of cultural identity. When two cultures communicate with each other, identity is the first problem they encounter [6][7][8]. The degree of cultural identity also profoundly affects the effect of cross-cultural communication^{[9][10]}. Cultural identity acts as a mediator in resolving conflicts, facilitating mutual understanding and promoting the effective communication between different cultures. While documentaries serve as one of the means of intercultural communication. Through documentaries, traditional Chinese culture can be disseminated worldwide, fostering the integration of different cultures. Therefore, this paper aims to analyze the manifestation of cultural identity in the documentary Seasons of China from three dimensions, namely "cognitive identity, emotional identity, and behavioral identity," and put forward corresponding suggestions for cross-cultural communication.

2. Research Basis

2.1 Definition of Cultural Identity

The theory of cultural identity was first proposed by the renowned American psychoanalyst Erik Erikson in 1950. Initially applied within the domain of personality development psychology, it gradually evolved to encompass self-awareness and socio-cultural dimensions, emphasizing their roles in addressing issues of cultural identity in a multicultural context. As one of the important theories of cross-cultural theory, cultural identity theory has been discussed by many scholars. In foreign countries, British scholar Smith posits that cultural identity can be constructed, relying on shared cultural symbols, historical experiences, collective memories, etc., within the group, reflecting certain personal value orientations and group values^[11]. Phinney suggests that cultural identity is a complex construct, including individuals' sense of belonging to the group, positive evaluations of the group by individuals, and the level of individuals' participation in group activities^[12]. Chen and Mendy defeined it as a complex and contested communication construct that influences individuals' self-perception and experiences in relation to others, influencing their understanding and experiences of the self in various contexts^[13].

In China, many scholars have conducted research on the connotations of cultural identity as well. Zhao and Liu suggest that identity is the primary issue encountered when two cultures collide, and cultural identity is the source of human significanc^[14]. Ren and Wang point out that cultural identity includes identification with native culture and acceptance of foreign culture, believing that cultural identity can promote communication and integration between different cultures, empower conflict resolution, and facilitate mutual understanding among nations^[15]. Xu mentions that common ideals, shared psychological needs, shared symbolic encoding, shared emotional projection, etc., are specific pathways to achieving cultural identity^[16]. In summary, cultural identity is the establishment of spiritual connections with other cultures and it involves the recognition of cultural symbols that possess common characteristics of different cultures.

2.2 Dimensions of Cultural Identity

Cultural identity exhibits complexity and diversity, with scholars abroad conducting extensive research on its dimensions. Phinney summarizes seven major components of cultural identity, including self-categorization and labeling, commitment and attachment, exploration, ethnic behaviors, evaluation and ingroup attitudes, values and beliefs, as well as ethnic importance and salience^[17], which essentially encompasses cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. Kwan and Sodowsky proposes four dimensions: cognitive, moral, emotional, and behavioral^[18]. Stern posits that cultural identity is a three-dimensional concept comprising cognition, behavior, and emotion, wherein identification with a culture involves individual acceptance of a group across cognitive, behavioral, and emotional domains^[19]. Pan et al. points out cultural identity is a multi-dimensional construct with cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components, each dimension validated through scale development and reflecting the complex interplay of cultural experiences^[20].

While scholars abroad have extensively researched the dimensions of cultural identity, domestic scholars have relatively limited studies in this area. Among them, Zheng and Wang (2005) proposes that cultural identity consists of an individual's cognition, attitudes, and behaviors aligning with those of the majority within a particular group^[21]. Wang and Hu suggests dividing cultural identity into three dimensions: cultural symbol identity, cultural identity, and cultural value identity^[22]. Cultural symbol identity pertains to the acceptance of cultural achievements, cultural identity involves attitudes towards cultural groups, and cultural value identity denotes acceptance of the values of cultural groups. These scholars' commonality in research suggests that cultural identity can be analyzed from the dimensions of cognition, emotion, and behavior. This provides a theoretical basis for this paper's exploration of cross-cultural communication of traditional Chinese culture from the perspective of cultural identity in the context of *Seasons of China*.

2.3 Introduction of Seasons of China

Seasons of China is a 24-episode experiential documentary produced by China Xinhua News Network Corp (CNC), which selects the 24 solar terms, one of the most famous intangible cultural heritages as its theme, aiming to explore the meaning of the 24 solar terms and their influence on contemporary Chinese. The documentary began to be broadcast on February 4, 2019, the day of the

Beginning of Spring, through many media platforms at home and abroad, and ended perfectly in the last solar term of the year. Each episode of the broadcast time corresponds to a solar term, and each episode tells the origin and customs of a solar term. The filming team visited 24 provinces and cities in China in one year, from Mohe in Heilongjiang province to Sanya in Hainan province, and filmed a total of 1,500 hours of exquisite materials, showing the charm of traditional Chinese culture - the 24 solar terms for Chinese and foreign audiences. Seasons of China has won the love of domestic and foreign audiences since its broadcast, and successfully spreads Chinese traditional culture to the world. Its single episode has more than 200,000 views on the foreign video platform YouTube [23] and has received a high score of 9.7 on the domestic video platform Bilibili. The reason why Seasons of China can achieve good cross-cultural communication effect is that it awakens the sense of cultural identity of Chinese and foreign audiences, and makes traditional Chinese culture transcend regional and cultural barriers. This makes traditional Chinese culture to be accepted and recognized by people from different cultural backgrounds. Hence, this paper takes Seasons of China as an example, analyzes its successful experience in cross-cultural communication from the perspective of cultural identity, and puts forward corresponding cross-cultural strategies of traditional Chinese culture.

3. The Embodiment of Cultural Identity in Seasons of China

Documentary is one of the most important approaches of disseminating culture to foreign countries. The biggest difference between documentary and art forms such as movies and TV dramas lies in its authenticity. Documentary is an art form that uses real people as materials and records real life. *Seasons of China* was filmed in the form of a documentary, showing the real impact of the 24 solar terms on contemporary Chinese life. In *Seasons of China*, the creator invites British people to be the host. It arouses foreign audiences' understanding and recognition of the 24 solar terms from the three dimensions of cognition, emotion and behavior through shooting food, farming activities and festival ceremonies, thus achieving good cross-cultural communication effect.

3.1 Strengthening Cognitive Identity

Cognitive identity is mainly manifested in people's awareness and recognition of the cultural symbol of the 24 solar terms. Every country has its own culture, and there must be differences in ideology, values and other aspects between different countries [16]. For example, according to Hofstede, Chinese people pay more attention to collectivism and attach importance to family ties, but Western people, on the other hand, tend to be more individualistic and value the independence of members of society. This difference will cause cultural conflict, thus hindering people's cognition of different cultures. In order to overcome the barriers of cultural differences, it is important to use the language and perspective familiar to westerners to explain traditional Chinese culture. It can effectively avoid misunderstanding of Chinese culture caused by the imbalance of discourse power [24]. To strengthen cognitive identity, *Seasons of China* depicts traditional Chinese culture through the perspective and language of westerners, and it uses western language to show the wisdom condensed in traditional Chinese culture^[23].

Firstly, it is hosted by a Britishman and uses English narration, which effectively solves the problem of language barriers in cross-cultural communication. Because there are differences in the way of thinking and language organization of people between the east and the west, when the foreign host uses English to introduce the meaning and customs of the 24 solar terms, it can avoid the blunt translation of Chinese to English or the words that could not reach the meaning exactly. For example, when talking about traditional activities in the *Beginning of Spring*, the Chinese word *Chunguan* is mentioned, and the host translates it as *Spring Announcer* instead of literally translating it as *Spring Official*. Such a translation not only explains the role of the *Chunguan* clearly, but also avoids the ambiguity caused by improper translation.

In addition, Seasons of China looks at Chinese traditional customs related to the 24 solar terms from a western perspective. For example, in the third episode Insect Awakening, the host Jiang Senhai came to Changting, the Hakka settlement. Bamboo shoots up high during the Insect Awakening, and it makes excellent material for Changting bamboo paper. The whitest and toughest bamboo paper is used to record Hakka family histories, which has continued generation after generation. Seeing the master take out a book that records Hakka family histories, Jiang Senhai says: "If you give me such a book and say that my grandfather wrote it, I won't read it at all." However, for the people of Hakka, the genealogy is the root of their nation, even if they are in different places, as long as they see the genealogy, they will

not forget where they come from, and they will not forget every member of their family. For foreigners, this seems to be a very strange thing. If the story is told purely by Chinese, then it is highly likely that this kind of conflict between Chinese and foreign cultures will be ignored. However, *Seasons of China* takes it into account, and specially makes Jiang Senhai, who comes from Britain, the host, so that the perspective of the audience and the host becomes identical. The host shares the conflict and incomprehension that the audience feels in the face of Chinese culture, and the host will express incomprehension about this conflict from their perspective. In *Seasons of China*, when Jiang Senhai asks the meaning of genealogy, the host explains that people from Hakka have moved from place to place and scattered their family members, so they need genealogy to record their ancestors. That is why people of Hakka attach great importance to the family. Many Hakka people from all over the country will return to Changting to worship their ancestors during the *Insect Awakening*. By this way, the cultural conflicts faced by the audience will be explained reasonably, so as to deepen the audience's understanding of traditional Chinese culture and strengthen their cognitive recognition of the meaning of the 24 solar terms.

3.2 Evoking Emotional Identity

Emotional identity is manifested as the audience's emotional resonance with the 24 solar terms. *Seasons of China* selects objects that embody people's common values, focuses on food and agriculture, and evokes emotional resonance among audiences from different cultural backgrounds, thus awakening their emotional identity with the 24 solar terms.

Food is an essential part of human life, and although the eating customs of each country are different, the recognition of rituals and the appreciation of food are similar [25]. Thus, food can serve as a bridge for cross-cultural communication, allowing people from different countries to develop emotional identity. Seasons of China links the meaning of solar terms with food, and uses food as a medium to spread traditional Chinese culture, which greatly reduces the "cultural discount" in cross-cultural communication. For example, there is a narration in episode 22 Winter Solstice: "Of all the customs, Chinese people carry out at the solar term of *Winter Solstice*, dumpling eating ranks first. About 1800 years ago, there lived a healer called Zhang Zhongjing. He went back to his hometown one Winter Solstice in one year and found many villagers with frostbitten ears. Zhang Zhongjing ordered his apprentice to cook up some mutton broth laced with peppers and herbs. Wrapped it in dough pockets shaped like ears and passed them out to everyone in hot soup. Frostbitten villagers were healed with a bowl of hot dumplings. Since then, in every Winter Solstice, people imitate the scene by making dumplings." It explains the connection between the winter solstice and eating dumplings to foreign audiences. The meaning of the solar term is given to the act of eating dumplings. Other countries have similar eating customs. For example, the Americans eat turkey on Thanksgiving Day, the Japanese people have soba noodles on New Year's Day, and the British eat Christmas pudding on Christmas. Although people from all over the world eat different foods on different festivals, the festival food embodies the cultural significance of blessing and ethnic continuity^[25], so the scene of Chinese eating dumplings on Winter Solstice brings foreign audience back to the scene of eating festival food during their own festivals, thus arousing their emotional resonance with the 24 solar terms. Similarly, the hairy crabs mentioned in Cold Dew, the persimmons in First Frost, and the smoked bacon in Light Snow all play the same role, arousing the emotional identity of foreign audiences through food and promoting the cross-cultural dissemination of traditional Chinese culture.

In addition, *Seasons of China* focuses on farming scenes to strike an emotional chord with foreign audiences. Although different cultural backgrounds lead to different ways of thinking, people's consensus can overcome the obstacles of cultural differences^[26]. The association between the seasons and agriculture is the consensus of the people of the east and the west. *Seasons of China* focuses on the scene of the Chinese harvesting wheat in the episode *Grain in Ear*, with the aim of resonating with the audience about the solar terms. In this episode, an old saying is mentioned: "In spring you can count in days, but in summer, you have to count in hours." This means that during the solar term of *Grain in Ear*, missing the time to harvest wheat by one hour will also greatly affect the yield of wheat. Hence, when *Grain in Ear* comes, the Chinese will harvest wheat as quickly as possible to ensure wheat yield. Only in Xiangcheng, the city filmed in this episode, produced 500 million kilograms of wheat, which could be eaten by one billion people for a day or 2.9 million people for a year. Wheat is one of the indispensable foods in both China and the west, so when foreign audiences see that the Chinese people follow the laws of the 24 solar terms for agricultural work to obtain such a large yield of wheat, they will have an emotional identity with the meaning of the 24 solar terms.

3.3 Awakening Behavioral Identity

Behavioral identity refers to the audience's enthusiasm in acquiring culture^[27], and the practice of that culture. Festive rituals are one of the most important factors in awakening behavioral identity. Although there are significant differences in festival rituals across countries due to cultural variations, their core essence remains the same^[25]. For instance, the core of both Western Christmas and Chinese Spring Festival is the expression of blessings. Starting from the shared values of both parties can effectively awaken a sense of identity. Festival rituals consist of various activities, and they inherently represent the practice of the holiday's significance.

In Seasons of China, festival ceremonies are emphasized to awaken the audience's behavioral identity. The description of the 24 solar terms in Seasons of China is always accompanied by an introduction to the corresponding festival rituals. For example, Seasons of China introduces the Spring Announcing being held in Beginning of Spring, the Rice Planting Festival in Bama County, Guangxi in Beginning of Summer, a ten-day-long opera about silkworm for celebrating silkworm goddess' birthday in Lesser Fullness, and the Winter Solstice Meeting held by people in Winter Solstice to exchange daily necessities to make preparation for the Chinese New Year. Different festivals and ceremonies have unique folk cultures, which can make foreign audiences interested in traditional Chinese culture and try to participate in these activities. In addition, festival ceremonies as a participatory activity can interact with off-screen audiences, thus attracting them to imitate such behaviors as making traditional paper-cutting and making dumplings to externalize the cultural values contained in the activity, thereby awakening the behavioral identity of foreign audiences with traditional Chinese culture.

4. Suggestions

Traditional Chinese culture represents the accumulated wisdom of the Chinese people over five millennia. It holds profound significance not only for China but also offers substantial utility for other nations worldwide. Dou and Liu have mentioned that some advantages of Chinese traditional culture can offset the shortcomings of western culture^[28]. It is very necessary to promote traditional Chinese culture to the world. How to effectively promote the cross-cultural dissemination of traditional Chinese culture has become a huge dilemma that China is facing today. Traditional Chinese culture should be allowed to transcend the gap between different cultures and use identity to solve the dilemma^[26]. For instance, strengthen the audience's cognitive identity through the use of diversified information dissemination platforms, make full use of traditional Chinese culture to awaken emotional identity and organize activities related to Chinese traditional culture to arouse behavioral identity.

4.1 Utilizing Diverse Information Dissemination Platforms to Strengthen Cognitive Identity

Since cognitive identity is mainly manifested in people's understanding and recognition of traditional Chinese culture, it is necessary to make full use of various different channels^[27] to create a chance for foreign audiences to understand traditional Chinese culture, so as to guide them to recognize traditional Chinese culture and strengthen their cognitive identity. However, Chinese media lack the international discourse power in the international communication pattern, that is, the right of a country to express its opinions on international platforms in order to protect its own interests^[4]. Consequently, in the process of cross-cultural dissemination, traditional Chinese culture often finds itself predominantly shaped by others which leads to a deficiency in self-shaping^[2]. This makes it difficult for traditional Chinese culture to fully show its charm when it is disseminated. For traditional Chinese culture to achieve optimal dissemination effects, it is imperative to leverage diverse information dissemination platforms to ensure that the dissemination content reaches a broader audience, thereby transforming passive dissemination into active dissemination.

First of all, it is necessary to make use of the international influence of well-known foreign platforms to build an integrated communication system and expand overseas communication channels^[24]. The information dissemination platforms at home and abroad are different. China's main information dissemination platforms include Weibo, WeChat and Bilibili, while foreign ones are Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and so on. If only domestic information dissemination platforms are utilized to promote traditional Chinese culture, the promotional effect will inevitably be significantly reduced. Besides, in the process of cultural dissemination, the role of emerging information dissemination platforms cannot be ignored. Nowadays, it is not enough to disseminate only through traditional media, and the disadvantage lies in its single form^[25]. With the growing development of science and

technology, many new information dissemination platforms have emerged in recent years, the most representative of which is Tiktok. The emerging information dissemination platform has gained a strong international influence by virtue of its rapidity, extensiveness, timeliness, and autonomy of information dissemination^[27]. It can break down the barriers created by cultural differences and removes barriers to communication between audiences across countries. *Seasons of China* is broadcast on foreign video platforms such as YouTube and Amazon, as well as on domestic video platforms such as Youku and Bilibili. It is because of the strategy of diversified video platforms to promote the interaction effect of internal and external communication that such a good cross-cultural communication effect has been obtained.

4.2 Leveraging Traditional Culture to Evoke Emotional Identity

As one of the intangible cultural heritages, the mystery of the 24 solar terms has greatly attracted the attention of foreign audiences in *Seasons of China*. It can be found that traditional culture should be fully utilized as a medium that easily arouses the emotional identity of the audience^[2]. Through the study of the cultural background of foreign audiences, targeted content is selected for dissemination, so as to arouse the understanding and emotional identity of foreign audiences of traditional Chinese culture. However, people who grow up in different cultures have different ways of thinking and values. Traditional Chinese culture with Chinese characteristics, including the concept of kinship and collectivism, but these symbols have a unique Chinese ethical and moral concept, which makes it difficult for overseas audiences to understand correctly^[29]. Thus, when carrying out cross-cultural communication of traditional Chinese culture, it is necessary to deeply understand the cultural differences that exist between different countries and alleviate the misunderstanding of traditional Chinese culture by foreign audiences.

One way is to find the commonality between the two cultures which can overcome the communication barriers caused by cultural differences^[26]. As Xu pointed out the audience does not passively accept information. Its cultural background, ideology, and acceptance habits determine the audience's selective acceptance of the communication content [30]. So it is important to consciously elect the contents that are easy for foreign audiences to understand and have commonality for communication. For example, Chinese operas, including Yue Opera, Beijing Opera, Henan Opera, etc., are very similar to Western musicals. Meanwhile, music has its own sense of imagery, which is easier than video to bring the listener into the emotional experience, and feel the rhythm and emotional flow. When foreign audiences enjoy Chinese opera, because of the similarity between Chinese opera and musical, it can arouse their emotional resonance, thereby strengthening their understanding and acceptance of traditional Chinese culture. Similarly, the art forms such as Chinese painting, paper-cutting, and calligraphy carry the Chinese spirit and they have a certain commonality with western culture, which is easy to be accepted by Western audiences and arouse their emotional identity. Another way is to innovate Chinese traditional culture by integrating it with Western culture, which can achieve unexpected communication effects. For example, the Beijing opera Turandot and Faust used traditional Chinese drama to interpret western stories. They had been reported by numerous western media and gained a lot of popularity in the west^[31]. Promoting the active innovation of traditional Chinese culture and keeping pace with the times can activate its vitality and attract more recognition and love from foreign audiences.

4.3 Organizing Relevant Activities to Awaken Behavioral Identity

Behavioral identity manifests as the practice of cultural values. When Chinese traditional culture is disseminated cross-culturally, it encounters various obstacles. One significant issue is that the dissemination often remains stuck in the rigid transmission of certain cultural symbols and concepts^[4], neglecting the cultural differences and conflicts between countries. For one thing, it is essential to update cultural dissemination concepts and abandon the outdated approach of unidirectional cultural output. Instead, a new model should be adopted that promotes interaction between foreign audiences and Chinese traditional culture through relevant activities. Organizing activities that involve foreign participants can showcase the unique charm of Chinese traditional culture and awaken their behavioral identity with it, thereby promoting Chinese traditional culture globally.

For another thing, organizing activities related to Chinese traditional culture to transform foreign audiences from passive recipients to active participants. Merely talking about Chinese traditional culture is unlikely to awaken the behavioral identity of foreign audiences. Various aspects of Chinese traditional culture, such as Chinese Kung Fu, Chinese drama and paper-cutting, can be experienced

firsthand by foreign audiences. These are representative masterpieces of Chinese traditional culture and enjoy a certain reputation abroad. As Pang mentioned that the exhibition of traditional Chinese folk art abroad and the teaching of Chinese Kung Fu at Confucius Institutes have been welcomed and loved by people from all over the world^[5]. It also proves that organizing activities related to traditional Chinese culture can effectively strengthen the international influence of traditional Chinese culture.

5. Conclusion

Traditional Chinese culture has a long history and unique charm, making the exploration of its global communication highly significant. This paper examines the successful cross-cultural communication of the documentary *Seasons of China* through the perspective of cultural identity theory and proposes corresponding strategies: utilizing diverse information dissemination platforms to strengthen cognitive identity, leveraging traditional culture to evoke emotional identity and organizing relevant activities to awaken behavioral identity. This study not only presents a new perspective but also provides valuable insights for the research on the cross-cultural communication of traditional Chinese culture.

However, this study has some limitations. Firstly, the proposed cross-cultural communication strategies are primarily targeted at western countries, addressing the obstacles arising from the cultural differences between China and the west. The cultural differences between China and western countries differ from those between China and other Eastern countries, such as South Korea and Japan. Future research can involve eastern countries and develop relevant strategies for cross-cultural communication. Secondly, a comprehensive analysis of cultural identity requires considering multiple perspectives. This paper focuses solely on *Seasons of China* to analyze the embodiment of cultural identity in three dimensions. Future studies can undertake more in-depth analyses of cultural identity theory from various aspects.

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