

The Use of Cultural Signs in Cultural Programs: The Case of *China in the Intangible Cultural Heritage*

Peng Jiyao

College of Animal Science and Technology, Nanjing Agricultural University, Nanjing, China
9203011318@stu.njau.edu.cn

Abstract: Under the background of Media convergence, the audience's demand for cultural programs is getting higher and higher, which requires cultural programs to constantly seek innovative ways, and the key to the great success of some cultural programs lies in the use of cultural signs. This paper takes the large-scale cultural program "Intangible Cultural Heritage" as an example, takes the trichotomy as the research field, studies its use of cultural signs, and explores the value and significance of these cultural signs, with a view to providing an innovative basis for the production of cultural programs.

Keywords: Cultural program; Cultural signs; China in the Intangible Cultural Heritage

1. Introduction

China in the Intangible Cultural Heritage is a large-scale cultural program launched by CCTV and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, which will travel to 11 provinces and municipalities to experience local intangible cultural heritage projects and learn about their new stories in the new era. Focusing on the innovative use and development of Intangible Cultural Heritage in the new era, this is a way to show the new face of China in the new era. "Semiotics sees the human world as a world constructed by signs. While human history is the history of the symbolization of nature and human society, signs mapping man's relationship with the outside world; human give meaning to signs, signs characterize culture, and culture is transformed by signs into a carrier of certain ideas and meanings."^[1] This article takes the trichotomy of signs as the research perspective, studies the application of cultural signs, and explores the value and significance of these cultural signs, in order to provide innovative basis for the production of cultural programs.

2. Embodiment of cultural symbols in the program

2.1. Symbol: Evoking the national memories

Symbol are symbolic, based on customs, certain laws, and are developed over time in a certain historical environment. Symbol is capable of expressing more abstract and diverse meanings, when a sign is able to form a broad association with something else, that sign can be seen as symbol. The use of symbol in cultural programs enables viewers, when seeing a certain cultural symbol, to combine it with a particular custom or cultural concept through the ethnic and cultural environment in which they live, so that they are mentally immersed in a cultural atmosphere, thus realizing the inheritance of culture.

China was the first country to raise silkworms and reel silk, ancient Greeks and Romans marveled at the delicacy and softness of silk, so once called China "Ceres", i.e. "Silk Country". When it comes to silk, Chinese people will think of silk, embroidery, men cultivating and women weaving and other cultural images, and further associate them with related Chinese cultural images. In an episode of *China in the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, the host and his team traveled to Taizhou, Zhejiang Province to experience the handmade craftsmanship of lake silk. The inheritors of intangible cultural heritage introduced the excellent toughness of silk to the host and his team after personally experiencing silk reeling. Then they tugged of war by connecting silk and steel wire, and the steel wire broke before the silk ultimately, this demonstrated the toughness of silk vividly. The host exclaimed about this phenomenon: Chinese culture is also a culture of silk, just as silk has the nature of toughness and continuity, the Chinese civilization can be inherited for 5,000 years, but also because the Chinese civilization has the toughness of civilization. This resilience comes from the generations of inheritors of intangible cultural heritage, which not only keeps the thread of culture alive, but will continue further today and in the future.

2.2. Icon: Creating an immersive atmosphere

The core of icon is resemblance, which can be both the most superficial form and sensory resemblance, such as a landscape painting that is icon of the geographic environment. It can also be a structural or meaningful resemblance, such as showing the importance of things by emphasizing them multiple times, in a way that matches the way more things tend to be more important in the real world, even a further step of more metaphorical resemblance can be shown. Through the reproduction of classic cultural images in the program, viewers can be immersed in the environment created by the program, reducing the sense of alienation caused by time and space, and allowing viewers to enjoy the program by a immersive way.

Famous paintings, landscapes, and other concrete things are the most intuitive image for the audience to feel, and it is also very easy for the audience to familiarize with and remember the image, and form an anchor point in the mind. When they see the image or similar or related images again, they can recall the memories related to them, as if they were back to the environment at that time.

An episode of *China in the Intangible Cultural Heritage* showed viewers the Putian wood carving of the same name based on *Along the River during the Qingming Festival*. As one of China's ten most famous heirloom paintings, *Along the River during the Qingming Festival* depicts the prosperous society of The Song Dynasty. Its fame is so great that most Chinese people have voluntarily admired it, been deeply impressed by its cultural value, and burned it in their memories. Putian wood carving turn two-dimensional image to three-dimensional image, so that the audience can observe from various perspectives to appreciate the folklore of The Song Dynasty, as if they were in it. Inspired by Putian wood carvings, the program's dance "Diao - Xu" uses AR (augmented reality), VR (virtual reality) and other technologies. Turning the wood carvings under the hands of Putian wood carving intangible cultural heritage inheritors into a stage for dancers, who also become a living character in the wood carvings. The changing scenes, movement and flying wood shavings in the dance form a dynamic image of the Putian wood carvers as they create their work. Viewers feel as if they are following the craftsmen in the making of their creations, blurring the boundaries between the real and the virtual, and completely immersing themselves in the atmosphere of the program.

2.3. Index: Passing on Cultural Ideas

Index as opposed to symbol, unlike symbol, which rely on the accumulation of formation over time, index tend to show some kind of direct relationship. It can be either a logical cause and effect relationship, where ripples in the water are a result of someone throwing a stone or a fish having been there; or some kind of spatial relationship, where two classic cartoon images that often go hand in hand remind you of the other when you look at one of them; or where every unusual manifestation of a human being can be seen as an indicator of a physical or mental illness. In cultural programs, the use of index can be seen as an attempt to represent the values embedded in a particular culture or artifact.

Taizhou embroidery is a type of Chinese folk embroidery, and its distinctive feature is that it inherits the original Chinese embroidery techniques while absorbing and integrating Western carving and drawing techniques, which is a witness to the early integration of Chinese and Western cultures. This craft has been well inherited and innovated with the traditional Chinese non-heritage, but in the West, it has almost been lost. According to the guest of honor, Mr. Pan Lusheng of the Chinese Folk Literary Artists' Association, the craft has been introduced to China for only one or two hundred years, but when he took our Chinese embroidery to communicate with Western artists, they were extremely shocked, as if they were seeing this craft for the first time. Taizhou embroidery heritage continues to respond to the innovation of the times, in the 2016 G20 Hangzhou summit in the main VIP room of the China Silk Museum on display in the new Taizhou embroidery screens.

In the same episode of *China in the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, we can also see a lot of index of cultural inheritance. Xu Chaoxing, the representative inheritor of the Longquan celadon firing technique, has worn off his fingerprints over and over again in his sixty-four years of dealing with porcelain. But as host Sa Beining said, while this wears away one important mark of the master, it also puts another, more important mark, the mark of the inheritor. Gu Mingqi is a representative inheritor of the handmade craftsmanship of lake silk, he still retains traditional silk reeling machines despite mechanization. He not only brings these old objects to promote silk reeling technology throughout the country, but also inherits traditional silk reeling techniques from family to school for new generation. For all this, the master's reasoning was that if he didn't keep it, no one would keep it. He wanted to be able to show his children and grandchildren the ancient art of reeling visually, vividly, and imaginatively when they were curious

about it. Taizhou embroidery representative inheritor Chen Ke was inspired by an incident in his youth: at that time, a member of the embroidery community came to ask for advice, but returned without success due to the master's absence. Master Chen then proposed to compile the needlework skills into a book for easy reference. Intangible cultural heritage is not just a real and directly visible finished product, it is in fact in the continuous inheritance, the production of these finished products of the techniques, craftsmanship. It is only on the basis of transmission that intangible cultural heritage can have room for innovation. And it is through the perseverance of generations of non-hereditary inheritors, the enthusiasm and sense of responsibility for traditional Chinese culture, this craftsmanship inheritance that makes these valuable cultural treasures uninterrupted.

3. The value of cultural symbols in the program

3.1. *Developing and innovating a culture*

China in the Intangible Cultural Heritage doesn't just focus on "tradition". As the program's host, Sa Beining, said in the program's opening, "Learn about their new stories in a new era." In the program *China in the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, viewers can not only see what kind of posture the intangible cultural heritages have been inherited, but also see how these intangible cultural heritages have been innovated in the new era, and what kind of posture they continue to shine in the new era.

Glass, silk, porcelain, etc. are all cultural signs, and when viewers see them, what may come to their mind is more of an ancient, traditional skill and handicraft. But in the program, we also see the innovative development of these ancient cultural symbols in the new era. Hand-blown glassware is a representative item of provincial intangible cultural heritage. Glass is the product of cultural exchanges and trade on the Silk Road. The glass products of Qixian, are now sold on the Belt and Road. These products not only have the characteristics of traditional Chinese culture, but also integrate the artistic styles of all nations in the world, which meets the aesthetic needs of local residents, and reflects the beauty and common. Not only that, but glass blowing technology is making a splash in the sciences as well. Shanghai Institute of Optical Machinery, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Shengguang device requires high-power pulsed xenon lamps is to rely on advanced glass blowing technicians glass lamp work technology to achieve, and the machine can not be done manually blown this accuracy. Silk as a fabric has been innovatively used in biomedical devices and even digital information technology, with silk made of bone nails can be naturally explained by the human body, greatly reducing the safety hazards, and silk made of bone nails also has a high degree of toughness, which is more than many of the current technology are ahead. In addition to mechanical properties, the optical properties of silk are also particularly good, and the Shanghai Institute of Microsystems and Information Research of the Chinese Academy of Sciences has used silk to make hard disks and brain-computer interfaces. In the past, serigraphs made of silk were tasked with recording and transmitting information, and today, silk continues to play its role in the field of information storage and dissemination through innovation. The celadon panels were fired by Longquan celadon technology, which are used in the Hangzhou National Edition Museum to create celadon screen fans. This new firing technique is the result of continuous innovation by inheritors of intangible cultural heritage. It is surprising that the area of celadon plates produced by firing is huge, and the error is only within 0.05 millimeters. Through these cultural signs, the audience can see living images of traditional culture, understand the inherent potential of intangible cultural heritage, and see the artisanal inheritance and innovative spirit of the intangible heritage bearers. It also proves to the audience the vitality of traditional Chinese culture, allowing more audience to participate in the inheritance and innovation of traditional culture.

3.2. *Dissemination of excellent culture*

"Based on the changes in the modern communication environment, the mobility, socialization and interactivity of media carriers have led to new ways of expression and means of communication for the dissemination of traditional culture, and the flow and re-creation of the meaning of cultural symbols have taken on a new form of logical self-consistency and have been integrated into the mechanism of semiotics. In the era of fragmentation, the dissemination of cultural symbols is an effective way to inherit and innovate the outstanding traditional Chinese cultural."^[2] The program team selects cultural signs and encodes them for the first time, and expands the cultural connotation of the signs by various means, so that when the audience decodes the signs, it can bring into play the audience's enthusiasm and subjective initiative to decode a richer meaning, the use of cultural signs helps the viewer to have a deeper understanding of the concepts that the program is trying to convey. Moreover, in the era of media

convergence, the audience is an active audience, and after receiving these cultural symbols, they will rely on their own cultural experiences and spiritual needs to personalize their interpretation and innovation. By this way, the use of cultural signs in cultural programs can not only disseminate traditional Chinese culture well, but also inspire viewers to actively understand and identify with it.

3.3. *Enhancing cultural identity*

The essence of today's competition among countries is the competition of comprehensive national power based on economic and scientific and technological strength, the game of innovation and the competition of cultural soft power. After entering the new century, the role of innovation, cultural soft power and comprehensive national power in national strength has been further emphasized, becoming the source of national development, the core of comprehensive national power and the key to national competitiveness. What makes a country win over other countries in international competition and what makes it stand on top of all nations? Naturally can only rely on what is unique to it, that is, its traditional culture. Abandoning the unique culture of one's own people in favor of learning from others, one is doomed to be a vassal of others, unable to stand on an equal footing with them independently and autonomously. China's 5,000 years of cultural splendor, but the hundred year of humiliation since the Opium War has dealt a serious blow to the Chinese people's cultural self-confidence. Since then, many people have regarded Western culture as the only civilized culture, and have completely rejected Chinese civilization, greatly weakening many people's cultural identity with their own people. Even today, this is not an uncommon phenomenon. However, if we want to continuously improve China's comprehensive national power and realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, we must first strengthen the cultural identity of our citizens.

In the program, cultural signs are transmitted through the media and are able to evoke the cultural memories of specific groups of people.^[3]"The essence of cultural identity is identity, and for members of a social group, classicized memory texts and signs are, in a way, a reproduction of self-image."^[2] In the continuous formation, construction and transmission of cultural symbols, members of society living in the same space and time also form a common cultural background and values. This value is unique to the decoding of a particular cultural symbol, and audiences in different cultural contexts decode the meaning differently. Therefore, through the cultural signs presented in *China in the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, Chinese viewers can gain a similar and identical understanding by decoding them, in which each individual can resonate with other individuals in the same cultural context, and find his or her own spiritual belonging in a large group. Through the use and dissemination of cultural signs common to Chinese culture, the audience is subconsciously imbued with traditional culture, allowing them to strengthen their cultural confidence and cultural identity.

4. Conclusions

The successful use of cultural signs in *China in the Intangible Cultural Heritage* provides valuable experience and reference value for the production and innovation of our future cultural programs. Signs is symbols and vehicles used to indicate and express certain ideas, and culture is an abstract concept that is difficult to perceive and generalize in a tangible way. Some cultural programs often pile up a lot of specialized cultural knowledge, which makes the program look boring and presents an elitist posture. And in the era of media convergence, the focus of communication is on the audience, and mass communication is the way forward. By combining culture and signs, through appropriate processing and coding, these familiar cultural symbols that appear in viewers' lives are presented in the program, which can not only immerse viewers in the atmosphere created by the program in an in-depth manner, but also attract viewers to watch the program and increase the ratings of the program. At the same time, it can also well export the program's cultural outlook and values to the audience, and play the communication effect that the program should have.

At the same time, Pierce recognizes that "in the form of reproduction, these signs are also largely based on custom." There is no such thing as a pure triad of symbols; it would be more accurate to say that any sign has a character of symbol, icon and index. The same applies to the use of cultural signs in cultural programs. Any sign has the three functions. When analyzing and applying cultural signs, one should not overly isolate each sign, because they have similarities and connections.

References

- [1] Shang Yuanyuan. (2021). *Study on the innovative communication of Chinese excellent traditional culture under the perspective of cultural signs--Taking "National Treasure" as an example. Dissemination and copyright* (10), 46-49.
- [2] Feng Yueji, Li Jing. (2019). *Creating national cultural signs: Value construction of Chinese traditional culture IP under the perspective of cultural self-consciousness. Chinese Editors Journal* (09),33-37.
- [3] Chen Haijun, Liang Zehui, Liang Shu. (2023). *Study on the Communication of Traditional Cultural Programs under the Perspective of Cultural Signs--Taking "Mid-Autumn Wonderful Tour" as an Example. Radio & TV Journal* (07), 91-94.