Exploring Strategies for the Global Communication of Xi'an Folk Culture through Semiotic Representation in the Digital Media Age

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Abstract: *In today's society where digital communication is developing rapidly, Xi'an folk culture, as an important part of China's excellent traditional culture, how to achieve effective international communication of its folk cultural symbols has become an urgent issue to be solved. Based on the theory of semiotics and multimodal communication, this paper starts from the typical folk practices of Xi'an, such as the Chenghuang Temple Fair, Huxian Shehuo folk performances, and the Nüwa worship ceremonies on Mount Li. By combing relevant literature and combining case analysis, it systematically discusses the communication strategy. The study found that the current Xi'an folk culture has problems such as fragmented communication content, differences in cultural interpretation, and insufficient use of multimodal means in the process of going international. In response to the above dilemma, the article proposes that a concrete multimodal narrative system should be constructed, the ability to reconstruct cultural context should be strengthened, and the digital communication platform should be fully leveraged to achieve precise cultural output. This study not only provides a theoretical basis and operational path for Xi'an folk culture to expand international communication channels, but also provides a useful reference for the global shaping and promotion of the image of Chinese culture.*

Keywords: *Xi'an Folk Culture, Semiotic Representation, Global Communication*

1. Introduction

At present, the trend of global cultural integration is becoming increasingly evident, and cultural soft power is gradually becoming one of the key indicators for measuring a country's comprehensive national strength. Culture is not only an important component of national image but also a crucial element of international competitiveness. Against this backdrop, how to effectively disseminate and interpret local cultural resources has become an important task in national and regional cultural strategies. As one of the important birthplaces of Chinese civilisation, Xi'an possesses profound historical accumulation and rich folk culture resources. These cultural symbols are diverse in form and profound in connotation, not only exhibiting distinct regional characteristics but also containing significant potential for cross-cultural communication. However, in actual international dissemination, due to the complexity of the folk cultural symbol system and the difficulties of contextual translation, Xi'an's folk culture often faces dissemination obstacles, manifesting as difficulties in explanation, high rates of misinterpretation, and fragmented audience understanding, thereby limiting the depth and breadth of its international dissemination.

Semiotics, as an important theoretical tool for studying the construction of cultural meaning, can provide a structured approach for the cross-cultural translation of folk culture. By encoding, decoding, and reinterpreting symbols, semiotics helps to reveal the underlying logic embedded in folk culture within rituals, narratives, and performances, offering methodological support for the regeneration of meaning in cross-cultural communication. At the same time, with the continuous evolution of the digital media ecosystem, cultural communication has entered a new stage characterised by the integration of multiple modalities such as images, language, sound, and video. Compared with traditional single-text communication, multimodal communication not only expands the pathways for cultural expression but also enhances audience acceptance and identification through interactivity, immersion, and participation. Therefore, at the intersection of semiotics and multimodal communication theory, exploring how to leverage digital media and multimodal narrative forms to broaden the international expression of Xi'an folk culture has become a research direction of both academic value and practical significance.

This paper will take representative folk cultural activities in Xi'an as the entry point, such as the City

God Temple Fair, Huxian Shehuo, and the Huangdi Mausoleum Sacrificial Ceremony, and conduct an in-depth exploration from the perspective of cultural core and symbolic meaning. Through case analysis and the assessment of current communication status, it seeks to propose practical and feasible suggestions for optimising dissemination. In terms of research methodology, this paper will adopt a combination of literature review, empirical case studies, and theoretical induction. On one hand, it will trace the cultural origins of relevant symbols from historical documents and existing research findings; on the other hand, it will analyse current digital communication practices, thereby providing a systematic plan to enhance the international discourse influence of local culture and exploring effective paths for the digital transformation and multimodal dissemination of traditional culture.

In recent years, international interest in traditional Chinese culture has gradually increased, but the content being disseminated still primarily focuses on certain "national-level" symbols, such as the Great Wall, kung fu, and Tang poetry. While these symbols undoubtedly possess high representativeness and recognition, their long-term repeated presentation has, to a certain extent, formed a "fixed impression." In contrast, regional folk cultures, due to their uniqueness and locality, often lack effective international translation and promotion, resulting in relatively limited global recognition. Compared with first-tier cities like Beijing and Shanghai, although Xi'an holds an irreplaceable historical and cultural position, it has yet to achieve a substantial impact in the international dissemination of folk culture. This phenomenon of "strong history but weak dissemination" places Xi'an in a relatively passive position in cultural diplomacy, international communication, and tourism brand development, preventing it from fully leveraging its unique advantage as a significant source of Chinese civilisation. Therefore, conducting systematic research on Xi'an's folk cultural symbols is not only an academic necessity but also an urgent issue in terms of cultural strategy.

Furthermore, as a form of "living culture," folk culture does not have a fixed process of transmission but is continuously renewed and regenerated through ongoing interaction with contemporary society. Whether it is the social governance and public communication functions embedded in city god temple fairs, the collective emotional mobilization and social integration mechanisms reflected in Huxian shehuo, or the narrative of civilisational origins carried by the Lishan Nuwa rituals, these cultural practices constantly gain new interpretations and significance in conjunction with modern society. In this process, an important issue in cross-cultural communication research is how to achieve "regenerative dissemination" of culture through digital media while upholding the core values of local culture. Regenerative dissemination not only implies formal modernization and digitalisation but also signifies the reproduction of cultural meanings in cross-cultural dialogue, that is, how traditional folk culture can acquire new vitality and interpretive power globally through new narrative methods and dissemination media.

2. Literature Review

In recent years, with the continuous integration of intercultural communication theory and new media technology, the application of semiotics and multimodal discourse analysis in cultural research has become increasingly widespread. Within this academic context, Zhang Delu [6] emphasised the role of social semiotics in analysing how various modal elements collaboratively construct meaning in multimodal discourse, particularly highlighting the irreplaceability of non-verbal signs such as images and sounds in cultural communication. Prior to this, he also proposed the concept of the 'materiality' of signs, pointing out that concrete forms such as visual layout and spatial arrangement play a significant role in the process of cultural meaning generation [7].Focusing on the visual presentation and narrative reconstruction of folk culture, Dong Wei [2], using folk documentaries as a core case, demonstrated how multimodal elements exert a synergistic effect in the construction of cultural meaning. He indicated that the integration of modal resources such as images and music not only enhances the intuitiveness of cultural expression but also helps to evoke emotional resonance in the audience, improving cross-cultural understanding, which is particularly pertinent in the context of international communication.

At the same time, the dissemination pathways of intangible cultural heritage have also become a topic of high interest in academia. Wang Ziyun [4], using the phenomenon of short video dissemination as a starting point, analysed the "Li Ziqi" series of works and found that language, imagery, sound and environment together construct a highly engaging cultural context. Annie, He Donglin and Hu Cidian [1] focused on the cross-cultural dissemination mechanisms of the sacrificial rituals at the Yellow Emperor's Mausoleum, pointing out that the organic integration of scene arrangement, ritual actions and visual symbols can significantly enhance comprehension and the sense of solemnity of rituals within a multicultural context.

From the perspective of translation studies, Wan Zhengfa [3] proposed that multimodal communication to a certain extent compensates for the limitations of language translation in information transmission and helps to construct a more complete and specific context for cultural dissemination. In addition, Yu Yong and Wen Yanan [5] systematically reviewed the development of folk culture translation through visual analysis methods, pointing out that the digitalisation of intangible cultural heritage, multimodal representation, and the adaptive transformation of cultural symbols have gradually become hot topics in academic research. The research paradigm has also evolved from the early single-text analysis to a comprehensive approach integrating cross-media elements and data orientation. The two scholars also emphasise that future research should pay more attention to feedback mechanisms in communication effectiveness, the enhancement of context reconstruction capabilities, and the adaptive expansion of cultural interpretation strategies across multiple contexts.

On this basis, recent research has further expanded the application of multimodal communication in specific cultural contexts. Dai Wenxin [8], starting from knowledge-based short videos, proposed a method of image layering theory in symbol construction, providing a new theoretical tool for the visual representation of folk culture. This study not only emphasises the hierarchical structure of visual elements in cultural information expression but also points out that layered presentation can guide the audience to gradually understand cultural connotations from a macro to micro perspective, helping to lower the threshold for cross-cultural understanding and enhancing audience interest and engagement. Zhang Yanfeng [9] studied the multimodal discursive empowerment of TikTok short videos in the dissemination of traditional Chinese medicine culture, emphasising the potential of short video platforms in enhancing cultural impact and international understanding. She pointed out that through the integration of text, imagery, music, and interactive features, short videos can not only vividly present complex cultural knowledge but also achieve cross-temporal and spatial cultural dissemination through comments, likes, and secondary creation, thereby enhancing audience engagement and cultural resonance.

Shu Xinmiao[10] analysed the cross-cultural communication of Chinese opera short videos on TikTok, proposing the effective international dissemination of cultural symbols through multimodal discourse integration. She emphasised that on short video platforms, the coordinated presentation of stage performance, costumes, music, and subtitles helps non-local audiences quickly grasp the core meaning of cultural symbols, while multimodal narratives can compensate for the limitations of language translation and achieve contextualised cultural representation. Song Zilin [11] and Yan Lin [12], respectively, explored the strategies and practices of different types of cultural content in overseas communication from the perspective of multimodal dissemination of national and rural images. They found that different audience groups have varying preferences for cultural content; therefore, in international communication, it is necessary to flexibly design multimodal combinations according to the type of culture and audience characteristics to enhance the precision and effectiveness of dissemination.

Luo Wenwei et al. [13] proposed a visual and multimodal methodology framework, providing a systematic approach for video content analysis. They emphasized that the collaborative effect between different modalities not only determines the completeness of information transmission but also directly affects the depth of cultural understanding by the audience. He Mengke [14], Zhang Han Yue [15], and Yuan Wenxiu [16] respectively provided practical guidance for the dissemination of different regional cultures on digital platforms from the perspectives of cross-cultural communication, urban image construction, and regional media image construction. These studies show that whether it is local folk customs, urban image, or specific cultural symbols, they can all be displayed and interpreted at multiple levels and dimensions through digital platforms, thereby enhancing the recognition and influence of culture in the international community.

Overall, the existing academic research has provided a solid theoretical foundation and practical reference for the international dissemination of Xi'an's folk culture. However, there are still some shortcomings. Firstly, most studies are still based on macro-theoretical analysis and lack in-depth analysis of specific folk culture cases in Xi'an, especially the lack of systematic analysis of cultural symbols such as folk festivals, folk rituals, and traditional handicrafts. Secondly, the systematic design of communication paths is still weak. The closed loop from content planning, production, release to audience feedback has not yet been fully formed, making it difficult to quantify and optimize the communication effect; especially in cross-cultural contexts, there is a lack of refined research on audience psychology and acceptance mechanisms, and it is impossible to accurately predict the understanding and response of cultural symbols in different cultural backgrounds. Thirdly, the application of digital technology and multimodal means has not fully exerted its potential. For example, new media technologies such as VR/AR, immersive interactive experiences, and game-based scene reconstruction have been tried in some cultural communication practices, but systematic research and application are

still rare, and no scalable experience model has been formed.

3. Analysis of the Semiotic Representation of Xi'an Folk Culture

As a renowned historical and cultural city in China, Xi'an has given birth to a rich and diverse system of folk - cultural symbols. This system can generally be classified into three major categories: festival rituals, folk arts, and historical heritages. It not only serves as a concentrated manifestation of local traditions but also functions as a cultural mechanism that bears values, maintains social structures, and consolidates emotional identification. Overall, these folk - cultural symbols possess both historical continuity and distinct regional characteristics, playing an irreplaceable role in shaping local cultural identities and constructing collective memories. However, in the context of globalization and digital communication, how to effectively reinterpret and re - disseminate these cultural symbols has become an urgent practical issue that needs to be addressed.

In terms of festival ceremonies, the City God Temple Fair, Hu County Folk Dance, and the Nüwa Worship Ceremony on Lishan Mountain are particularly representative. The City God Temple Fair is not only a traditional religious ceremony but also symbolizes social governance and public communication. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, temple fairs were often the information hubs of local society. They not only fulfilled the function of maintaining religious beliefs but also played a certain role in cultural integration, public opinion expression, and public opinion dissemination. The diverse activities such as sacrifices, processions, markets, and theatrical performances in the temple fair constitute a social scene that integrates religion, economy, entertainment, and public interaction. If digital means, such as virtual reality technology, are utilized to recreate the lively scenes of the temple fair and combined with multilingual explanatory texts and academic guided tours, the social governance functions, collective interaction logic, and cultural integration value behind the temple fair can be conveyed to international audiences. They will not merely remain at the superficial understanding of "the temple fair being just a lively scene", but will be able to further grasp the sociological and anthropological significance it contains.

The Huixian Village Fire Festival features performances such as dragon and lion dances, yangko, water-carrying boats, stilts, etc., creating a visually striking and engaging collective celebration scene. The significance of the Village Fire Festival goes far beyond being a form of folk entertainment; it is also an important manifestation of collective emotional mobilization and public life in local society. In international communication, Huixian Village Fire Festival can draw on the successful experience of the "Shikin Festival" in Japan. The Shikin Festival not only has been listed in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List but has also entered the international market through various means such as immersive videos, international exhibitions, thematic exhibitions, and anime adaptations, becoming an important medium for global cultural exchange. If Huixian Village Fire Festival can "go global" through similar paths, such as combining the dragon and lion dance performances with international festival activities like overseas Spring Festival parades, or using AR/VR technology to recreate the grand scenes of "Thousand-Household Village Fire Festival", it can maintain the solemnity of the ceremony while enhancing the interactivity and immersion of international communication, enabling overseas audiences to gradually understand the collective consciousness and cultural symbols behind it through participation and experience.

The Lishan Nuwa Sacrifice is centered around the "Healing the Sky" myth, which is distinct from ordinary festival activities. It is not merely a local sacrificial ceremony but also a symbolic expression of the narrative of the origin of human civilization. The story of Nuwa healing the sky reflects the ancient people's thoughts on the relationship between humans and nature, conveying the common desire of humanity to maintain order, hope, and reconstruction in the face of disasters and difficulties. In a cross-cultural context, the Nuwa myth can be compared with the "Prometheus Theft of Fire" in Greek mythology. Both narratives revolve around "how humans can break free from the constraints of nature and move towards the development of civilization", showcasing common themes of civilization across cultures and time. This cross-cultural mythological analogy not only helps international audiences understand the profound value of Chinese myths from a familiar cultural context, but also provides new interpretative space and discourse points for cross-cultural narratives, thereby enhancing the explanatory power and dissemination ability of Chinese folk culture.

Overall, the symbolic system of folk culture in Xi'an has formed a unique tension between historical continuity and cultural regeneration. On one hand, it profoundly reflects the values, belief structures, and group identities of the local society; on the other hand, it is also constantly being endowed with new

functions and communication channels by contemporary society. However, in international communication practices, the cultural connotations contained in these symbols often fail to be accurately understood by foreign audiences due to the lack of effective contextual conversion mechanisms. For instance, when Western audiences watch the Huizhou folk dance, they may only see the lively scenes of the performance, but overlook its function in mobilizing collective emotions and integrating society; the worship of Nuwa on Lishan might be misunderstood as a religious ceremony with pantheistic overtones rather than a cultural allegory related to the origin of civilization. Moreover, there are also limitations in the communication methods: the application of digital means is insufficient, the selection of symbols lacks systematic organization, and the multi-modal narrative path has not yet been perfected. These problems have prevented the overall communication effect of Xi'an's folk culture from reaching the expected ideal level.

Therefore, how to re-narrate and re-code these cultural symbols through digital presentation, cross-cultural analogy and multimodal communication paths has become a key issue that needs to be urgently addressed at present. Only by taking into account academic interpretation, interesting experience and cross-cultural dialogue can Xi'an folk culture not only have the appeal to international audiences, but also be correctly understood and deeply recognized in the global context. This is not only the need for local culture to "go global", but also an important measure for building a community of shared future for mankind and promoting cross-civilization exchanges.

4. Analysis of the current status and problems of international communication of Xi'an folk culture symbols

In the contemporary media environment, the dissemination of folk culture is no longer confined to a single textual narrative or traditional stage performance, but is gradually evolving into a multimodal, multi-layered, and multi-platform composite form. With the deep integration of digital technology and Internet media, the diversification of narrative strategies and the differentiation in audience reception have become important factors influencing the effectiveness of cultural dissemination. Therefore, in the process of digital transformation and international communication of folk culture, it is necessary to systematically design and optimise from three levels: multimodal narrative, contextual reconstruction, and social platform dissemination, in order to achieve effective presentation of cultural connotations and the spread of value.

Multimodal Narrative Level: Application of Layered Narrative Strategies. The so-called "layered narrative strategy" refers to designing diverse content levels and narrative methods based on the knowledge background, aesthetic demands, and acceptance habits of different audience groups. In this process, the communicator no longer solely relies on a single-dimensional information transmission, but instead achieves the organic combination of academicity and entertainment, depth and interest through multimodal means.

First of all, for academic audiences, their main demand lies in obtaining cultural interpretations that are systematic, theoretical and highly academic. They often possess a high level of cultural literacy and research capabilities. Therefore, in the design of their communication content, they can focus on promoting academic papers, research monographs, in-depth documentaries, and professional interview programs. For instance, when conducting research on "Shehuo culture", interdisciplinary interpretations can be carried out by integrating the perspectives of history, anthropology, and folklore, and a systematic analysis can be conducted from three aspects: ritualistic significance, social functions, and symbolic representation. This kind of content not only meets the knowledge needs of the academic community, but also promotes academic exchanges and international dialogues in related fields.

Secondly, for the general public, their cultural needs tend to lean towards relaxation and integration into everyday life. Therefore, communication strategies should emphasise engagement and interactivity. Cultural short films featuring story-driven and situational elements can be launched on short video platforms, using simple and accessible language to explain complex folk rituals. Additionally, reality-based experience programmes can invite young people to participate in folk festivals firsthand, experiencing the atmosphere of traditional performances or ceremonial rituals. In this way, folk culture is no longer a distant academic topic but becomes a vibrant cultural practice closely connected to daily life.

Furthermore, for the adolescent demographic, their media consumption habits rely more on forms of communication that are visually striking and highly interactive. Emerging mediums such as animation, gaming, and virtual reality offer opportunities for the reconstruction and reinterpretation of folk symbols.

For instance, the myth of Nüwa repairing the sky could be adapted into an animated series, imbuing it with new cultural significance through contemporary narrative styles; similarly, interactive games themed around the 'Shehuo' festival could be developed, allowing players to experience the vibrant atmosphere of 'ten drums and gongs' in a virtual setting, or even participate through role-playing. Such innovations can not only stimulate the interest of adolescents but also subtly foster a sense of cultural identity.

Context reconstruction: The application of cross-cultural analogies. In cross-cultural communication, differences in cultural context are often the key factors causing comprehension barriers. To address this, the "analogy method" can be used to build bridges between different cultures. Analogy, as a cognitive approach, can help the audience understand unfamiliar cultural phenomena by referencing familiar cultural experiences, thereby reducing the difficulty of acceptance and enhancing cultural affinity. For example, China's Shehuo activities are characterised by 'collective revelry', with their enthusiastic atmosphere, group performances, and the creation of a sense of ritual, which bear a significant resemblance to European carnivals. Through cross-cultural comparison, Western audiences can gain a more intuitive understanding of the function and value of Shehuo in Chinese society—it is not merely a festive entertainment activity, but also an embodiment of collective identity and social cohesion. Similarly, the myth of Nuwa mending the sky bears certain parallels in cultural significance with the legends of gods in Greek mythology. By drawing such analogies, audiences can find points of understanding within familiar mythological narrative frameworks, thereby better appreciating the cosmology and anthropological perspectives inherent in Chinese mythology.

Furthermore, in context reconstruction, the effect of analogy can also be strengthened through cross-media approaches. For example, when narrating the myth of Nuwa, relevant clips from Greek mythology can be presented to create a direct visual comparison; when introducing Shehuo activities, videos of European carnival streets can be shown, enabling the audience to form more intuitive cultural associations through juxtaposed imagery. This method not only enhances the vividness of the narrative but also amplifies the tension of cultural dialogue in a multimodal context.

Social Media Dissemination: Strategies for Matrixed Operation With the prevalence and development of social media, different platforms exhibit clear differences in functionality and target audiences. Therefore, in the process of promoting folk culture, it is essential to implement matrixed operation in accordance with platform characteristics to achieve an organic integration of "fragmented dissemination" and "systematic interpretation".Specifically, short video platforms such as TikTok rely mainly on algorithmic recommendations and traffic-driven mechanisms, making them suitable for lightweight, fragmented dissemination. Through concise, fast-paced video content, the audience's attention can be captured within seconds, and engagement can be enhanced using popular elements and interactive features. For example, a series of short videos titled "Understanding Shehuo in Ten Seconds" could be launched to introduce the main characteristics of Shehuo through rapid scene transitions and narrated commentary.

In comparison, platforms such as YouTube are better suited for hosting in-depth cultural interpretations. Through documentary channels or series of lectures, it is possible to systematically introduce the historical origins, regional differences, and contemporary value of folk culture. The difference between short and long videos happens to be complementary: the former attracts audiences through entertainment and immediacy, while the latter guides audiences to a deeper understanding of culture through scholarly and systematic approaches. Through a multi-platform matrix operation, a complete communication loop can be formed: short videos stimulate interest in fragmented dissemination, long videos deepen knowledge through systematic interpretation; social interaction enhances engagement, and academic resources increase authority. Ultimately, within this cyclical communication mechanism, folk culture can achieve a transformation from 'drawing attention' to 'deep understanding', thereby gaining a broader space for dissemination in a global context.

In summary, through the multimodal presentation of layered narrative strategies, the contextual reconstruction of cross-cultural analogies, and the matrixed operation of social dissemination, the dissemination pathways of folk culture can be systematically optimised. This composite dissemination model not only meets the needs of different audience groups but also reduces comprehension barriers in cross-cultural communication and enhances a sense of cultural closeness. More importantly, it can establish a multi-level, multi-dimensional pattern of cultural dialogue on a global scale, allowing folk culture to truly 'go global' and demonstrate unique charm and value in a cross-cultural context.

5. Conclusion

Based on the theoretical support of semiotics, this paper integrates the research results of multimodal communication and combines the unique folk culture resources of Xi'an to systematically sort out the type characteristics, communication status and optimization path of cultural symbols and construct strategies. The study found that Xi'an folk culture has distinct regional identification and communication potential in terms of symbolic form and cultural structure. However, when it comes to international communication, there are still many bottlenecks such as difficult symbols, difficult content resonance, and single media form. In order to meet the above challenges, this paper proposes a comprehensive strategy with multimodal narrative as the core, supplemented by the context reconstruction of cultural symbols and the precise communication of social platforms, striving to work together from three aspects: content construction, audience acceptance and communication methods. In the communication pattern increasingly dominated by digital media, the form of cultural communication is transforming from single narration to scenario-based experience and emotional interaction, which puts higher requirements on the adaptability and innovation of local culture.

The theoretical significance of this research lies in integrating semiotics, multimodal communication, and regional folk culture studies, providing a new research paradigm for the international dissemination of local cultures. The practical significance is offering an operational path for the digital transformation and international dissemination of Xi'an's folk culture.

Future research can delve deeper in the following three directions; Conduct audience feedback surveys to establish a data-based evaluation system for the cultural dissemination effect; Promote interdisciplinary research on Xi'an's folk culture, such as combining it with tourism studies and digital anthropology; Explore the application of artificial intelligence in cultural translation and dissemination, for example, automatically generating multilingual subtitles and AI virtual guides.These explorations not only help enhance the global recognition of Xi'an's folk culture but also provide a reference for the international dissemination of other regional folk cultures in China.

Acknowledgements

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