

The Innovative Development Strategies of International Cultural Exchange Programs from the Perspective of the Belt and Road Initiative

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Abstract: *The "Belt and Road" Initiative, as an important strategy for China's opening up in the new era, provides a broad platform for international cultural exchanges. However, challenges are still seen in the development of international cultural exchange programs, including insufficient cross-cultural integration, cultural conflicts and fierce competition. In order to cope with these challenges, this paper analyzes the content and form, structure and presentation of communication of current international cultural exchange programs, and finally gives feasible strategies for further innovation and breakthrough. They focus on how programs can be technologically empowered to develop, how to bring closer cultural exchanges and how to improve brand effect with Chinese characteristics. All these aim to put forward more targeted strategies for the development of international cultural exchange programs, further promote the exchange and mutual learning of civilizations, and enhance the soft power of China's culture.*

Keywords: *International Cultural Exchange Program; the Belt and Road Initiative; International spread; Program Innovation*

1. Introduction

Since its inception, the "Belt and Road" initiative has emerged as a pivotal platform for global economic growth, cultural exchange, and mutual understanding between civilizations. The role of international cultural exchange programs as a crucial medium in this process cannot be overstated. Their innovative evolution is crucial for enhancing cultural exchange efficacy and diversifying cultural expressions. However, facing the tide of globalization and the rapid advancements in new media technology, traditional international cultural exchange programs are struggling to keep pace with the escalating knowledge demands and emotional connectivity aspirations of people along the "Belt and Road" route. Therefore, it is imperative to delve deeper into the innovative development path for such programs. This report meticulously examines the current status and challenges of international cultural exchange programs within the "Belt and Road" framework, offering tailored strategies and recommendations to serve as a guide for the planning, production, and spread of these programs.

2. Analysis of current situation of transcultural exchange under the Belt and Road Initiative

The current status of cross-cultural communication under the Belt and Road Initiative is primarily discussed from three aspects: the integrated development of cross-cultural communication, the differences and conflicts that arise in cross-cultural communication, and the competitive development within the international media industry.

2.1. Integrated development of transcultural exchange

Against the macro backdrop of globalization and the Belt and Road Initiative, exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations have become more urgent and frequent. In this process, countries are not mutually exclusive. Instead, they should get mutual learning and support in a harmonious symbiosis. In promoting the construction of the Belt and Road Initiative, China is not trying to create its own backyard, but to build a garden shared by all countries. With a population of 7 billion, more than 200 countries and regions, and more than 2,500 ethnic groups, human society has created and developed a variety of civilizations over a long period of time. There are many countries and regions along the Belt and Road,

and many civilizations, each of which has its own unique cultural deposit, and there is no superiority and inferiority between them. Different civilizations need to learn from others' strengths and complement their own weaknesses for mutual progress. Therefore, cultural exchanges under the Belt and Road Initiative are not one-way cultural exports, but two-way or even multi-directional cultural interaction and integration. Chinese traditional culture showcases itself to the world while actively absorb the cultural essence of other culture along the Belt and Road, thus realizing the mutual learning, mutual understanding and common development of different cultures. Therefore, there is a major issue for international cultural exchange programs: how to promote cross-cultural exchanges, leverage the cultural deposit and value of different cultures, present the charm of multiculturalism with an international perspective, and build a cultural community with the concept of mutual help and symbiosis.

2.2. Differences and conflicts of transcultural exchange

With diversity in harmony between cultures of countries along the Belt and Road and the limitations of people's cultural cognition and cultural differences, cultural conflicts often become a serious obstacle to cross-cultural exchanges. According to statistics, as of August 2023, China has signed more than 200 cooperation documents with 152 countries and 32 international organizations, covering 83% of the countries with which it has built diplomatic relations. These countries cover a vast area, have different historical backgrounds and speak a wide variety of languages. In the process of promoting cross-cultural communication, it's inevitable to meet challenges such as the differences of cultural backgrounds, language communication barriers and conflicting values. To a certain extent, the cultural diversity has led to deviations in the understanding and acceptance of traditional Chinese culture among countries along the routes, thus making cultural exchanges less profound and extensive, and possibly causing some misunderstandings and conflicts. At present, the discourse of China's international communication is based on the logical reasoning mode of deduction. In other words, "reasoning first, then presenting facts", which is a didactic discourse that is difficult to be accepted by foreign audiences, and may even stimulate the reverse psychology of them. In spite of common ground of countries along the Belt and Road in culture, language and geography, it does not mean that one can put forward demands on the culture and customs of other regions according to its own values and culture. Therefore, it's now an important mission to showcase the essence and values of traditional Chinese culture and surmount cultural barriers while ensuring the precise delivery of information in the process of promoting cross-cultural communication, and seek cultural resonance and enhance the audience's sense of participation and identification.

2.3. Development of international media industry

With the in-depth promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative, the international media industry has ushered in unprecedented opportunities for development, with a proliferation of programs competing on the international stage, thus building the competition pattern characterized by diversity. Some countries with relatively developed economies boast media with communication capabilities, while some emerging economies and economically backward regions are lagging behind in the development of the media industry. That provides the media industries of countries along the Belt and Road with the space and potential for complementary cooperation. At the same time, the international media industry is gradually breaking through the traditional boundaries, and cross-border integration has become a trend, such as the integration of traditional and new media, and the gradual integration of the media industry with other industries, such as tourism, culture, etc. Therefore, cross-border integration and innovation have become an important direction for the development of the media industry.

However, the rapid development of China's international cultural exchange programs are accompanied by the problems of homogenization and the lack of innovation in the content of the programs. The programs tend to be consistent in the selection and presentation of topics, and the excavation and expression of cultural connotations appears shallow, and lacks depth and uniqueness. The phenomenon of homogenization refers to the fact that when presenting traditional Chinese culture, programs fail to deeply leverage and interpret deep cultural meaning, thus resulting in monotonous and boring content, which makes it difficult to attract the audience's sustained attention. The lack of innovation is reflected in both form and content. Firstly, the lack of innovation in form lies in the lack of novel ways of presentation, which makes it difficult to stand out on the international stage with fierce competition. Secondly, the lack of innovation in content presents itself in the fact that some programs overemphasize entertainment and commercialization, while neglecting the in-depth the leveraging and inheritance of traditional cultural values, thus making programs less artistic and thoughtful. Therefore, it's an important issue for China's international cultural exchange programs to deeply leverage the cultural

deposit and get rid of the homogenization in cross-cultural communication, so as to stand out in a galaxy of information.

3. Ways of innovation and development of international cultural exchange programs

The practical pathways for the innovative development of international cultural exchange programs are primarily analyzed from three aspects: the mutual learning and interconnection between program content and format, the innovative adjustment of program content and structure, and the introduction of new ideas in program content and spread.

3.1. Mutual learning and common ground of programs' content and form

Under the "Belt and Road" initiative, the cultures of countries along it are symbiotic and flourishing. In this context, through their unique contents and forms, international cultural communication programs have deeply explored and presented the cultures of many countries in the fields of history, art, custom and so on, and demonstrated the cultural diversity and unique charms of the countries along the Belt and Road through brilliant performances and creative presentations. At the same time, forms get more innovative diverse, because art forms, including dance, painting, and song, are applied to interpret different cultures and arts, and new cultural expressions are created through elaborate choreography and combinations.

For example, the Beauty of Shared Arts, a program jointly launched by CCTV and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2023, is of great brilliance. It focused on the "Cultural Silk Road" to showcase the stories of mutual understanding, open cooperation, and multicultural exchanges under the Belt and Road. Guests from Serbia, Kazakhstan, Laos, and other countries along the Belt and Road were invited to the program to enjoy excellent performances characterized by integrated cultural forms, like music, dance and visual arts. At the same time, the form of the program with bold innovation absorbed media elements, and it brimmed with modern features. Creative cooperation between top Chinese and foreign artists offered great visual enjoyment to the stage, among which "Symphony of Steel", a scenario dance drama with percussion and modern dance as its main elements, presented the historical changes of HBIS Group Serbia Iron & Steel and the perfect blend of art and history. "The Beauty of Shared Arts" broke through the constraints of the traditional mode of cultural exchange, and presented the exchange and collision between different cultures in a new perspective and way. This innovative attempt has not only enhanced the audience's knowledge and understanding of the cultures of the countries along the Belt and Road, but also showed the image of China as a major country in a true, three-dimensional and objective way. The program has important reference value and significance for promoting cultural diversity, and facilitating cultural exchanges and mutual understanding as well as building a cultural community.

3.2. Innovative adjustments in programs' content and structure

Against the backdrop of increasingly close international exchanges and cooperation, international cultural exchange programs have begun to showcase cultures while exploring the path of "seeking common ground while reserving differences". These programs adhere to cultural values, respect and show the different characteristics of the countries along the Belt and Road, and promote cross-cultural dialogue and understanding by exploring common ground and respecting differences as their cornerstone. For example, Riding Wind 2024 illustrates the meaning of seeking common ground while reserving differences. The program used music and dance to crystallize international women's wisdom with different cultural backgrounds to work together to pursue the integration of art and beauty. The program has respected and showcased the contestants' cultural backgrounds and stories, and it has also demonstrated cultural diversity through self-reporting and performance, encourages cross-cultural exchange and cooperation, so as to create artistic works with individual and common features. What's more, Divas Hit the Road also demonstrates the wisdom of "seeking common ground while reserving differences". The program has set up two sections, "compulsory courses" and "elective courses". Through the "Compulsory Course", the program visited key cooperation projects and Chinese enterprises, thus showing the changes brought by China's wisdom and power, while through the "Elective Course", the program shared in-depth experiences the human history and local customs of the places visited, and reminisced about transnational friendship. This elaborate arrangement emphasized not only the common ground of different cultures, but also the unique features of them, thus enhancing the audience's participation and sense of identity. To a certain extent, the above two programs have presented the harmonious symbiosis of "seeking common ground while reserving differences", promoted exchanges

and understanding between different cultures, provided important references and inspiration for seeking cultural resonance and shortening the distance between audiences, and enabled people to have a deeper understanding of the importance and value of cultural exchanges.

3.3. Innovation of program content and spread

"Previous program narratives about national strategies, internal narrative or external communication, have adopted the grand narrative approach, so that the official narratives beyond the real life of the people's method appear boring and lack the affinity among the people. Actually, it is important to make the audience empathize when grand themes are presented."^[2]Therefore, concrete points are a must for grand themes. As an international cultural exchange program, the Beauty of Shared Arts integrates interview-style dialogues with mingling performances, which allows guests to share their stories, and it also show the charm of culture through the interpretation of dance, music, and other art forms. This interactive and enjoyable way of presentation allows audience to appreciate the unique charm of multiculturalism in a relaxing atmosphere. The program is showed on international platforms like CCTV Comprehensive Channel, and it embraces new media, for multiple channels including the official website and social media, are utilized to promote the program, thus building an pattern of online and offline spread.

While Divas Hit the Road, presents the landscape of countries along the Belt and Road in a vivid and dynamic way. The program breaks the previous pattern of traditional cultural exchange programs. Instead, it combines study tours and cultural exchanges, so as to allow guests to personally learn the history and culture, customs and development achievements of countries along the Belt and Road. This presentation method with diverse content and interesting forms, brings audience a visual and spiritual feast. It is worth mentioning that the program also adopts the form of "long video screening on platform and microblogging short live broadcast" to draw the virtual distance between guests and audience, thus realize in-depth interaction. In addition, the program also encourages fans to have "second creation", so that the content of the program gets extensive spread and influence. The innovative breakthroughs of the above two programs content and spread methods not only broaden the viewers' horizons, but also provide valuable reference value and significance for other programs.

4. Development strategies of international cultural exchange programs under the perspective of the Belt and Road

The development strategies for international cultural exchange programs under the perspective of the Belt and Road Initiative are primarily discussed from three aspects: promoting diversity and technology-driven development; seeking commonalities to bridge emotional distances; and adhering to innovation while maintaining integrity to create a brand effect.

4.1. Multifaceted integration through technology-empowered development

Advanced technology drives international communication. "The development of information technology has injected impetus into the digitalization and information application of the innovation and production of to be applied to audiovisual programs. An increasing number of programs break through the limitation of time and space of traditional stages by integrate technologies including virtual reality interaction and holographic projection into stage composition."^[1]Therefore, international cultural exchange programs should make full use of artificial intelligence, big data, virtual reality, cloud computing, meta-universe and other emerging science and technology industries, so as to apply more online technologies in spreading. What's more, they should take integrated development as an opportunity to realize the combination of traditional and new media, and build the all-media communication system. For example, the Beauty of Shared Arts has applied virtual reality technology to build a virtual scene to introduce the history, culture and natural scenery of all countries to enhance the audience's sense of immersion. In fact, social media has become an important channel for today's communication. Through social platforms, such as MicroBlog, Tiktok, Facebook and RED, programs can quickly spread to more audience, and they can express views and feelings on social media, which not only strengthens the program's interactivity and attractiveness, but also helps to make the programs more influential and popular through two-way communication. However, it should been seen that technical empowerment is only a means, instead of purpose. The core lies in that programs are utilized to convey cultural deposit and value orientation. Therefore, it's imperative not to show off technologies for keeping original targets in mind.

4.2. Seek common ground for bonding

Countries along the Belt and Road are equipped with different cultural backgrounds and values, but they still share common ground. Consequently, international cultural exchange programs can choose topics they all face and focus on. Different civilizations can build bridges of friendship between different countries, regions and ethnic groups by upholding the philosophy of "harmony in diversity, resemblance without homogenization" in the process of exchanges and mutual learning. "In the era of the globalization of communication, cultural exchanges and media communication transcend all borders. The world needs to hear more voices from China, while China have to express itself in a way that other countries understand."^[3]Therefore, in terms of content selection, international cultural exchange programs should resort to common issues and focus on communication that prone to resonance. Actually, common issues refer to ones that are common in different countries and regions and transcend national boundaries. They can promote cross-cultural communication and realize in-depth dialogues. And communication for resonance can be understood as a community of emotion which arises from emotional resonance through the transmission, diffusion and sharing of similar feelings. For example, International Double Line has chosen many topics about daily life and emotion. In this program, a section named "Full-time Housewife" talks about the issue of full-time, and another section called "You're Happy, I'm Happy", collects the views and feelings of people from different countries about different stages of love. These daily topics create a sense of intimacy through emotional resonance, bringing the program closer to the audience. Therefore, international cultural exchange programs should seek common ground from individuality, and create content about common but not similar issues. All these can help bridge cultural gap resulting from geographical differences between audiences with different races and cultural backgrounds, thus enhancing the proficiency of international communication.

4.3. Build brand effect through innovative inheritance

Innovative Inheritance asks to innovate what is inherited and learn from others. In other words, it's imperative to take Chinese civilization as main body while learning the strength of other civilizations. In order to strengthen international communication content construction, it's imperative to work closely based on Chinese culture, display the essence of Chinese culture, and create the brand effect with Chinese characteristics. It's also necessary to connect China's culture and others, and realize the unity of inheritance, innovation and development, so as to bond people of all countries. Bold innovation should be based on upholding essential traditions for refreshment. Upholding essential principles means adhering to cultural fundamentals, inheriting the essence of Chinese culture, and maintaining Chinese characteristics. Programs should embody the core values and spirit of Chinese culture, pass on the excellent traditional Chinese culture, highlight Chinese characteristics and show unique cultural elements in the process of internationalization. For example, the Beauty of Shared Arts and Divas Hit the Road are themed on the "Cultural Silk Road", which not only makes itself more distinguishing, but also helps enhance the international influence of Chinese culture. However, Upholding essential principles does not mean stubborn persistence, because international communication must give up the unilateral subjective thinking, and the international communication of culture that aims at the exchange and mutual understanding of civilizations, needs to embrace "subject-subject" relationship instead of "subject-object" relationship for dialogues on an equal footing. It's still adoptable to incorporate globalization elements on the basis of essential traditions, carry out cross-border cooperation and innovative practices, and upgrade the form and content of programs. In short, international cultural exchange programs should adhere to the position of Chinese culture, create a brand effect of Chinese characteristics, and actively integrate into globalization, as well as contributing Chinese wisdom and approach to the world's cultural diversity.

5. Conclusions

Through the research and analysis of the innovation and development strategies of international cultural exchange programs, it's assumed in this paper that with the Belt and Road Initiative, international cultural exchange programs boast a broad development prospect and space for innovation. It's imperative to continue to leverage cultural deposit, innovate the program form and content, broaden the communication channels and platforms, and strengthen international cooperation and exchanges, so as to promote the high-quality development of international cultural exchange programs, and contribute Chinese wisdom and strength to enhance the friendship of countries along the Belt and Road, and promote the peace and development of the world.

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