Research on International Cultural Communication Carriers in China: Taking Hong Kong Film, Hangzhou Animation, and Online Novels as Examples

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Abstract: The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China stated that “Extending the reach and appeal of Chinese civilization.” “We will deepen exchanges and mutual learning with other civilizations and better present Chinese culture to the world.” Xi Jinping emphasized during the 30th study session of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee: “We must promote Chinese culture beyond our national borders, advocating common values, sharing our ideas, and increasing mutual understanding.” Therefore, the question arises that “how to better promote Chinese culture going global”? Cultural communication as a medium for spreading culture is the basis of international cultural communication. Building a cultural carrier is crucial to promoting Chinese culture to the world, building a discourse system with Chinese characteristics, and developing international cultural communication theories. Furthermore, what characteristics should the cultural carrier have to better adapt to the psychology of the audience and effectively carry out international cultural communication? This article studies from the perspective of social psychology and combines the theory of communication, and adopts the method of case study. Taking Chinese Hong Kong movies, Hangzhou animation and network novels as examples, analyze their characteristics of international cultural communication. Hope to summarize the enlightenment of the construction of international cultural communication carriers from the perspective of China. The conclusion is that Hangzhou animation is more suitable as the main cultural carrier to promote Chinese culture globally.

1. Introduction

Cultural and international communication capabilities are the embodiment of national soft power, they are increasingly central topics in the study of international politics and culture. To a certain extent, the success of international cultural communication represents a country's influence and discourse power in international politics. Gramsci believes that the war between the proletariat and European countries is not a Russian-style violent revolution, but an ideological battle. Although Gramsci's cultural leadership theory has gradually been questioned more and more since it came out, his idea of positional warfare is still recognized by the academic circle and has been widely used in the world. It can be said that the international spread and development of culture, like the development of culture itself, is an important dimension of the progress of international politics and civilization. As a tool of cultural communication, cultural carrier is the basis of international cultural communication. The ensuing question is, under the strategic background of Chinese culture going global, how should we build our country's international cultural communication carrier?

Due to the huge differences between China's cultural heritage, ideology and political system and Western countries, the study of international cultural communication largely depends on cultural background and political identity. Therefore, there are relatively few foreign studies on international cultural communication from a Chinese perspective, while there are more domestic related studies. Professor Xie Luncan from Communication University of China believes that the construction of contemporary cultural carriers should...
focus on combining with new media and using Internet technology to improve communication efficiency. Lu Guoliang relied on Actor-network theory to propose that submarine cables, as the international communication infrastructure, are forming a complex network with people, and all countries are vying for control over international communication materials. Du Jianyong and Su Ming analyzed the international communication capacity building of Chinese news media by studying foreign news media’s coverage of the Beijing Winter Olympics. Yin Le and Gao Huimin based on Marx and Engels’ communicative views, sorted out the ecology, logic and path of the international communication ability of Chinese regional culture in the new era. Wang Jiawei based on the perspective of communication and from the perspective of foreign audiences, he believed that the construction of the international communication ability of Chinese culture should take into account the universality and particularity, create memes (meaning high-speed communication) products, close to daily life, pay attention to non-ethnic narratives. Zhou Kai and Zhang Yan pointed out based on the theory of communication rituals that cultural communication should not only focus on the effect of “linear communication”, but also pay attention to the excavation of cultural symbols. To sum up, most of the relevant research on international cultural communication carriers belongs to the fields of political science and communication, mainly from the perspective of international communication. Although some studies have focused on the acceptance of foreign audiences, they are still only supported by communication theory, and it is difficult to explain why individuals or groups accept foreign cultures.

From the perspective of foreign audiences, based on social psychology and communication theories, this article discusses what characteristics cultural carriers should have in order to better adapt to the audience’s psychology and carry out effective international cultural communication. The article takes Chinese Hong Kong movies, Hangzhou animation and online novels as examples, all of which have achieved good cultural communication effects in international cultural communication. This article adopts the method of case study, compares the characteristics of Chinese Hong Kong movies, Hangzhou animation and network novels, and summarizes the development direction of international cultural communication carriers. The conclusion is that due to the transformation of Hangzhou animation to Japanese animation style and the characteristics of low cultural requirements, Hangzhou animation performs better in the three dimensions of “eliminating differences”, “stimulating curiosity” and “weakening divide”. Therefore, compared with Hong Kong films and online novels, Hangzhou animation is more suitable as the main cultural carrier of international cultural communication. For China, promoting international cultural communication scientifically and investing limited resources in effective industries has practical and theoretical significance for the ideological struggle of the Communist Party of China and the development of international cultural communication theory in the new era.

2. Concept definition and theoretical framework

Before discussing the issues raised, it is necessary to clarify the important concepts covered in this paper.

After the term “culture” was born, the concept of “cultural carrier” was born. “The father of anthropology” Taylor pointed out in the book “Primitive Culture” that “Cultural carrier refers to the carriers of various physical and spiritual forms, media and communication tools for spreading culture. Cultural carrier is an important way and means for the formation and diffusion of culture.” The concept of culture is abstract and general, and the cultural carrier is the entity that makes culture concrete. Cultural carriers can be material or spiritual. At this level, movies, comics, anime, dances, songs, books and even Confucius Institutes are all cultural carriers.

The theoretical support of this article mainly comes from social psychology. The research methods of cultural sociology are usually different from those of natural sciences. Cultural sociology mainly focuses on difficult-to-quantify objects such as words and symbols from the perspective of hermeneutics. With the development of cultural sociology, the branches are becoming more and more diverse, and a large number of scholars have poured into the field of cultural sociology. Gradually, some scholars seek theoretical support from social psychology and cognitive science, which are more natural sciences. It involves cultural transmission, which is obviously different from traditional cultural sociology research, and should be analyzed from the psychological perspectives of transmission and reception.

Wu Lei and Jiang Fei believe that the concept of “Western” has evolved into a synonym for the opposite of Chinese ideology, and the construction of China’s foreign exchange language system must first eliminate the cognitive basis of opposition. The psychological recognition of China’s excellent traditional culture is undoubtedly the key to eliminating the basis of opposing cognition. Social identity theory believes that human
beings will divide themselves into different groups according to their identities such as race, religion, culture, occupation, etc., and then identify with other people in their own group and have prejudice against other people in other groups. Based on the theory of social identity, eliminating prejudice is a feasible way for audiences to produce psychological identification with foreign cultures. From a cognitive perspective, bias comes from people’s stereotypes. “In the implicit association test, the subjects usually visually classify the attribute concept representing the target, thus creating a stereotype and then showing a positive or negative attitude”[17]. In other words, the first condition for people to identify with or prejudice against others is to make attribute judgments through vision. When a cultural carrier can visually eliminate the differences between groups, it can eliminate people’s stereotypes, eliminate prejudice, and achieve the purpose of cultural identity.

On the other hand, the stimulation of curiosity is an important reason for the media to promote the effective communication of audiences. In the field of new media dominated by short videos, the concept of attention economy has greatly improved the content creation mode of the industry[4]. One of the core points of the attention economy concept is to “attract the audience’s attention as soon as possible so that they can continue to watch the complete content”. The way to attract attention is usually to use the audience’s curiosity[6]. From a psychological perspective, “cognitive dissonance” is the reason why people are curious. Cognitive dissonance theory believes that when people have contradictory cognitions and observe opposite information, people will actively tend to change the contradictory cognitions to make them consistent with the original cognitions[19]. Therefore, the more a cultural carrier can shape a message that is in contrast with people’s real life, the more the cultural carrier can stimulate the audience’s cognitive dissonance. The cultural carrier makes the audience curious, which will enhance the communication effect.

In addition, from the perspective of communication, the media also has requirements for the cultural level of the audience. The high or low level of education affects the audience’s understanding of the communication content, and also determines whether the audience accepts the use of the media. Knowledge gap theory holds that people with rich knowledge reserves, media technology, and economic ability can often obtain more information, while people without rich knowledge reserves, media technology, and energy usually cannot obtain more information. After a long time, the knowledge gap between the two will be widened[23]. This means that when the cultural carrier conducts international cultural communication, the knowledge reserve of the audience is one of the reasons that affect the communication effect. Cultural carriers have lower requirements for knowledge reserves, which means it will gain more audiences.

Based on the above theories, this article will compare the characteristics presented by different cultural carriers from the three dimensions of “eliminating differences”, “stimulating curiosity”, and “weakening the divide”, and analyze which characteristics are more suitable for the psychology of foreign audiences and can achieve better cultural communication effects.

3. Methods, Data and Discussion

This article adopts the case study method, takes “elimination of differences”, “stimulation of curiosity”, and “weakening of the divide” as the analysis unit. By combing the development process, influence and reasons of the three industrial cultural carriers of Hong Kong film, Hangzhou animation and network novel, the international cultural communication characteristics of the three cultural carriers are extracted respectively, and then the advantages and disadvantages of the three cultural carriers are analyzed.

The origin of Hong Kong movies can be traced back to “Chuang Tzu Tests His Wife” in 1913. However, it was not until the establishment of Shaw Brothers in the 1950s and the implementation of industrial model production and modern innovation that Hong Kong films began to really take off. Since then, Hong Kong films have entered a new era, not only producing various types of films, but also creating many world-renowned stars[12]. If Hollywood films represent the Western film culture headed by the United States, then Hong Kong films at that time were representatives of Eastern film culture. One of the reasons for the success of Hong Kong films lies in their special historical influence. British colonization brought indelible pain to the people of Hong Kong and even the entire Chinese people, but it also contributed to the diverse and open culture of Hong Kong. Various world cultural elements gather, communicate and collide in Hong Kong, including Guangdong Lingnan culture, Chinese traditional culture, British Weiminning culture, etc., forming a unique Hong Kong film culture. However, with the occurrence of the financial tsunami that almost spread to the entire Asia-Pacific region in 1997, Hong Kong’s economy was seriously affected, and the Hong Kong film industry also began to decline from this period. Economic instability and other factors have led to difficulties for the Hong Kong film industry, including rising production costs, changes in market demand and competition from films from other regions.

The development of Hong Kong films from prosperity to decline provides a complete case for academic research. Strictly speaking, the reasons for the decline of Hong Kong films are diverse and complex. Some scholars believe that the prosperity of Internet media in the 21st century is one of the reasons for its decline[26]. But it still needs to be noted that after that, the prosperity of the cultural industry brought about by the Korean wave, Bollywood, Japanese animation, Taiwanese movies and the economic boom of the mainland all squeezed out the original market of Hong Kong movies. Especially the rise of online film and television apps (such as Youku, iQiyi, Tencent, etc.) has provided a broader platform for movies to spread. In this respect, the relationship between Internet media or Internet technology and film is not contradictory, but mutually beneficial. Therefore, the relationship between the decline of Hong Kong films and the rise of Internet media may not be as great as Dr. Huang Zhan said. As a cultural carrier, film can undoubtedly carry the
culture of a region or even a nation. The reason for the rise of Hong Kong movies is also related to the fact that Hong Kong movies in the 20th century contain a lot of traditional Chinese elements and Western countries have long been curious about the mysterious oriental culture. It can be seen that the reason for the decline of Hong Kong films is not technological progress, which also means that the revival of Hong Kong films is entirely possible. In terms of the three theoretical dimensions described above in this article, film as a cultural carrier has little effect in eliminating layers of difference. As a visual expression of culture, film art relies heavily on the element of actors. Therefore, the nationality and characters of actors will make it easier for the audience to produce “prejudiced psychology” and it is difficult to obtain the cultural identity of the audience. At the same time, compared with other cultural carriers at that time, Hong Kong movies were not outstanding in arousing curiosity. Film is a form of artistic expression based on reality. Although it can be post-processed with the help of film and television special effects and other technologies (the current technology is still immature), it still cannot express its connotation too exaggeratedly. Especially compared with written forms of expression, visual communication compresses the audience’s imagination, making it difficult to arouse the audience’s curiosity and cognitive dissonance. The above two points may be the underlying reasons for Dr. Huang Zhan’s conclusion that “Hong Kong films have declined due to the rise of Internet media”. In terms of the knowledge gap, the cultural carrier of film has a low knowledge threshold, and most films do not have high requirements for the cultural level of the audience. Even for some movies with deep connotations, due to the huge investment, the producers must consider suiting most audiences, movie costs and profits, which will make the movie easy to understand. In terms of media technology capabilities, the popularity of movies is already very wide, and people do not need strong media technology capabilities to get information about movies released in theaters. In terms of economy, the ticket prices of some movies are not very low, which has raised the requirements for watching movies to a certain extent.

Compared with Hong Kong movies, the development of Hangzhou animation and its industry is relatively late. Chinese animation originated in the 1920s. With China first animated feature film “Princess Iron Fan” going to the world (distributed to Southeast Asia and Japan) in the 1940s, Chinese animation industry gradually became brilliant. But later it declined due to many reasons. Since the 1960s, the vigorous development of the Japanese animation industry and its cultural exports to the outside world have gradually obscured the light of Chinese animation. Today, when the word “anime” is mentioned, people usually think of cartoon characters incorporating various Japanese cultural elements. The economic and cultural success of the Japanese animation industry has attracted the attention of countries around the world. The State Administration of Radio, Film and Television of China issued “Several Opinions on the Development of my country’s Film and Television Animation Industry” in 2004, which promoted the rapid development of my country’s animation industry. In 2005, Hangzhou stood out among many domestic cities by utilizing the urban function positioning of “building digital Hangzhou and building paradise Silicon Valley”, and won the right to host the China International Animation Festival. As of 2011, there were 270 registered animation companies in Hangzhou, employing more than 20,000 people, producing 38,000 minutes of original cartoons, and completing 930 comic works. Hangzhou deserves to be the “City of Animation” in China.

Today’s Hangzhou animation is influenced by Japanese animation in terms of painting, dubbing style and even storytelling, such as the recent well-known domestic animation “Fox Spirit Matchmaker”, “Rakshasa Street”, “Once upon a time there was a spirit sword mountain”, etc. Which are more close to the Japanese style. And early animations such as “Havoc in Heaven” and “Gourd Baby” are closer to the traditional Chinese drama style. It can be said that compared with the early Chinese animation, Hangzhou animation has weakened the distinctive Chinese cultural characteristics and is closer to the Japanese style. From the perspective of international cultural communication, the change of Hangzhou animation style can take advantage of Japanese animation and its good global audience base to gain a high degree of recognition in people’s minds. As far as the three dimensions of “eliminating differences”, “stimulating curiosity” and “weakening the divide” mentioned above in this article are concerned, Hangzhou animation has an absolute advantage in eliminating differences. The depiction of anime characters usually makes it difficult for the audience to distinguish attributes such as race and country, making it easier for the audience to generate cultural identity. In terms of curiosity, Hangzhou animation is more exaggerated than movies. The characters and scenes of animation can be drawn from reality, or they can be divorced from reality. Moreover, the viewing time of each episode is short, which can arouse the audience’s curiosity and concentration, and can induce a certain degree of cognitive imbalance among the audience. In terms of weakening the divide, there is not much difference between animation and movies, and neither requires an excessively high level of education and knowledge reserves. However, the dissemination of animation usually relies on the Internet, which may prevent some groups with weak media skills from becoming audiences for animation. But from an economic point of view, the profit model of animation usually comes from the collection of copyright fees and advertising fees, and there are not many requirements for viewers to pay, which can greatly weaken the gap.

The origin of Chinese online novels is basically synchronized with the rise of the domestic Internet, but existing research is still unable to trace the specific time of the origin of online novels. With the emergence of online novel platforms such as Tianying Literature, Huanjianshuneng, and Qidian.com, Chinese online novels are gradually rising. It is worth mentioning that Chinese online novels have already had a wide audience overseas due to their unique style, such as Wuxiaworld, Gravity Tales, Volarenovels and other foreign and foreign websites are translating and reprinting Chinese original online novels on a large scale. “Qidian.com” also develops
a website abroad, translating and reprinting genuine online novels commercially. The site is named Webnovel.

Novels have a long history as an expression of literary art. The only difference between online novels and novels is that online novels must rely on Internet technology and mobile phone devices to be read. In terms of eliminating differences, the novel cannot provide the audience with an intuitive image of the characters, but it can eliminate prejudice and achieve social recognition for the audience’s cognitive level. The communication effect of novels relies heavily on the imagination of the audience, and the imagination of the audience is based on their original cognition. Therefore, novels have a stronger function of eliminating differences than movies, but weaker than animation. In terms of arousing curiosity, novels undoubtedly have excellent conditions. The charm of literature lies in its unlimited space, just like “a thousand readers have a thousand Hamlets in their hearts”. The low cost allows the author to arbitrarily superimpose reality and create infinite possibilities, which obviously helps to stimulate the audience’s cognitive dissonance and make readers constantly curious. In terms of weakening the divide, online novels need a higher level of knowledge to a certain extent. This kind of knowledge depends not only on whether they are literate, but also on whether readers have a certain literary quality and can appreciate excellent works. On the other hand, whether readers understand the background structure of the novel, itself also affects whether they can continue to read. Because of the characteristics of Internet novels that rely heavily on Internet technology and mobile devices. Therefore high demands have been replaced on potential audiences in terms of economic and media capabilities.

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4. Conclusions

The importance of cultural carriers in international cultural communication cannot be ignored. Based on the theoretical perspective of social psychology and communication, this paper analyzes the three dimensions of “eliminating differences”, “stimulating curiosity” and “weakening the divide” of Chinese Hong Kong movies, Hangzhou animation and online novels. The conclusion is that, because Hangzhou animation is similar to Japanese animation in many styles, it can make better use of the good audience base that Japanese animation has laid in the global cultural market, and it can use animation’s characteristics of being divorced from reality and ambiguous attributes to eliminate differences and stimulate curiosity. It is difficult for the audience to generate prejudice but can generate stimulate cognitive dissonance, so they agree with the cultural connotation carried by Hangzhou animation. In addition, the group-oriented Hangzhou animation does not need to have a high knowledge reserve. While online novels are currently popular abroad, they are limited by the original cognition of the audience in terms of eliminating differences, and are weak in weakening the gap. Online novels have relatively high requirements for knowledge reserves, media skills and economic capabilities, it is difficult to reach more audiences. Although Hong Kong movies were once brilliant, they rely heavily on actors and it is difficult to break away from reality on the visual level. The current post-production special effects technology can make up for its shortcomings in stimulating the public to recognize the disorder, but the huge amount of money required for special effects cannot compete with the low cost of animation. So it is considered that Hong Kong movies cannot be used as a suitable Cultural carriers carry out international cultural dissemination. This paper believes that among the existing relatively mature cultural carriers, the animation with Hangzhou as the main industrial base is particularly prominent. The construction of Chinese cultural communication carriers should fully consider the characteristics of different carriers, and choose a carrier suitable for cultural output develop manner. At the same time, due to differences in cultural backgrounds among countries and ethnic groups, while developing and constructing cultural carriers, it is necessary to flexibly apply the different characteristics of different cultural carriers and implement targeted international cultural dissemination strategies. In addition, just like Japanese animation culture, Hong Kong movies, Hangzhou animation and online novels have actually formed a certain ontology culture. While developing and constructing cultural carriers, the promotion and development of new culture should not be neglected. Strengthening non-state narratives to a certain extent and integrating excellent traditional cultural elements of the country into the cultural carrier culture is a valuable experience provided by the above cases.

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