

From Going Out to Going In: Cross-cultural Communication Strategies of Cultural Going Out

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Abstract: Through the analysis of “Flowers and Youth: Silk Road Season”, it has been found that promoting dialogue between different civilizations from a dual perspective, enhancing the integration of cultural outreach with local life, and achieving the reconstruction of communication strategies and value extension can enhance the sense of immersion among cross - cultural communication audiences. The study indicates that to overcome the linguistic, contextual, and cultural cognitive barriers of local audiences, cross - cultural communication needs to creatively transform language, imagery, and sound to align with local cultural contexts, meet the needs of audience localization, and stimulate emotional connections between heterogeneous cultures. The selection of communication strategies, in turn, involves the reconstruction of localized cognition and value adaptation of China’s culture.

Keywords: Intercultural communication; Localization; Empathy; Communication efficacy

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1. Introduction

Chinese civilization is an important part of human civilization, and the time-honored culture of China is a treasure of world culture. In recent years, domestic scholars have focused on the variety shows that have emerged in recent years, exploring multidimensional approaches to reduce cultural discount, achieve cross-cultural communication, and enhance international influence. They have also produced a wealth of achievements in areas such as innovative communication strategies, localized practices, technological empowerment, and their pathways, while revealing the practical challenges in the export of program formats.

Currently, the construction of a three-dimensional interactive model of “symbolic object—symbolic representation—symbolic interpretation” has effectively strengthened the international recognition of Chinese culture through the creative transformation of audiovisual symbols ^[1]. By integrating national strategies with entertainment narratives, a positive interaction between cultural values and entertainment attributes is achieved ^[2]. Variety shows carry cultural information in a low-contextualized and entertaining manner, lowering the acceptance threshold for overseas audiences ^[3], effectively presenting and extending visual culture by transforming audiovisual programs into audiovisual narratives, expressing “locally,” fostering emotional resonance, and conveying Chinese culture to overseas audiences ^[4]. In a typical case study of a variety show, Liao Keyin argues that “informal meetings” break the discourse of cultural centrism through inclusive

fields and open topics, providing a “decentralized” model for cross-cultural communication ^[5]. Variety shows need to balance national agendas with market demands, avoiding cultural discount due to excessive politicization ^[6]. However, some scholars argue that existing research has not adequately discussed whether their images are actively accepted by overseas audiences ^[7]. China’s original variety shows still suffer from weaknesses in originality and insufficient international expression, leading to limited recognition in overseas markets ^[8].

This study examines the communication strategies and effects of “Flowers and Youth: Silk Road Season” (hereafter “Silk Road Season”), addressing the core question: How can variety shows achieve a “soft landing” of policy discourse through narrative reconstruction and symbolic innovation? Under the guise of technological empowerment, how can cultural exports transcend the “traffic-first” logic to genuinely build value recognition? The exploration of these issues not only provides academic insights into the “Silk Road Season” case but also holds significant practical implications for upgrading cross-cultural communication paradigms in variety programming.

2. The practice and value of cross-cultural innovation communication in “Silk Road Season”

In 2023, marking the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative, this historic milestone provided a significant opportunity for the dissemination of Chinese culture. During the planning phase of the IP “Silk Road Season,” efforts were made to address the challenges of evolving audience aesthetic demands and the entertainment-oriented nature of traditional travel variety shows, which had become inadequate for communication needs. In terms of program design strategy, the focus was placed on “Silk Road Study Tours,” employing a down-to-earth perspective on daily life, micro-level observations, and public viewpoints, with real-life scenarios and emotional interactions at the core. This approach deconstructed the vast theme of the Belt and Road into relatable and understandable life details for the audience. During the Saudi Arabia segment, members of the Huashao Team visited a logistics center built with China’s assistance, witnessing how China’s express delivery technology solved the problem of low logistics efficiency in the region ^[9]. By comparing China’s “one-day delivery” with Saudi Arabia’s past “months-long delivery,” the audience could intuitively experience how “China’s speed” improved local livelihoods. In the fifth episode of the high-speed rail study tour, the Huashao Team members traveled to Jeddah, a new city in Saudi Arabia, via the “Maimai High-Speed Rail.” They listened to Silk Road builders recount stories about the overseas construction and service of “major national projects” like the Maimai High-Speed Rail and the Pelasez Bridge. A friend from Libya praised China’s high-speed rail as “China No.1.” Kruno from Kormana Village commended China’s builders as outstanding workers. These authentic emotional narratives allowed the audience to see that the Belt and Road Initiative is not only about international cooperation but also a cultural and emotional connection, naturally conveying foreign audiences’ recognition of China’s infrastructure improvements in enhancing livelihoods. The program not only reenacts the distinctive cultural features of these countries through its narrative while traveling, but also promotes the deep integration of national strategies and mass entertainment, making it an innovative practice model under the “cultural export” policy.

Building on the IP DNA, the program strategically breaks away from the traditional single-channel dissemination model of variety shows, emphasizing the narrative logic of conflict and tension. Leveraging new media technologies, it initiates online interactions on platforms like Weibo and TikTok, connecting guests with multimedia audiences to form an omnimedia dissemination matrix of “long-form videos + short-form videos + live streaming.” During its recording in Iceland, the program collaborated with Xinhua News Agency to launch the “Walking with the Light” live-streaming event, attracting over 3.3 million netizens to interact in real time. Netizens virtually witnessed the aurora borealis alongside the Huashao Group and made wishes in the bullet comments. This real-time interactive format enhanced the immersive experience, achieving cross-cultural and cross-temporal empathy for “Silk Road Season,” which became an instant social media sensation upon broadcast. Simultaneously, the program opened up secondary creation platforms like Douyin, Weibo, Xiaohongshu, and Bilibili, expanding its reach. Productions such as “Zhao Zhaoyi Imitating Doraemon” and “Qin

Lan's Bird of Paradise Scene" sparked nationwide discussions upon release, generating a wealth of fan-created content. As a visual carrier of the "Belt and Road," the program successfully transformed China's image from "mysterious and distant" to "approachable and credible." The China Daily praised the program as a model for telling China's story to the world^[10]. It promotes cultural exchange and interaction between China and foreign countries, igniting college students' enthusiasm to visit travel destinations like those frequented by the Huashao Group. This multi-channel, multi-format approach has become key to boosting audience engagement, increasing program popularity, enhancing user stickiness, and extending IP influence^[11].

"Silk Road Season", as the visual carrier of the "Belt and Road", successfully transformed the image of China from being perceived as "mysterious and distant" by foreign audiences into being trusted as "approachable and credible". China Daily published an article stating that the program serves as a model for telling China's story to the world. This innovative practice not only enhances the international communication effectiveness of variety shows but also provides a replicable experience for cultural export. Using emotional resonance as a bridge and presenting "big themes" through "small perspectives", it conveys cultural confidence in entertainment. This innovative practice not only enhances the international communication effectiveness of variety shows but also provides a replicable experience for cultural export.

3. Audience feedback across multiple platforms and circles

As of February 4, 2024, "Silk Road Season" had topped the trending charts across all platforms 10,889 times, including 188 instances leading multi-platform searches. The show's cumulative trending duration exceeded 64,858 hours, reflecting its massive audience engagement and ongoing discussions. With nearly 8,500 trending mentions and 35,561.5 hours of total chart presence, it emerged as one of the year's most viral phenomena. The 3,462 derivative creations sparked over 72.01 billion views, averaging nearly 5 billion reads per internet user. Viral memes like "Dianyin Duola" generated 190 million discussions, demonstrating the audience's shift from passive viewers to active participants. This not only highlights young audiences' preference for entertaining content but also showcases the show's ability to break through traditional boundaries through viral topic expansion.

"Silk Road Season" demonstrated significant differentiated effects in cross-platform dissemination, reflecting the impact of different media ecosystems on content acceptance. As the core platform of public opinion, Weibo recorded 820 million views of popular videos, confirming the effectiveness of celebrity effects and topic marketing; TikTok and Kuaishou's trending topics reached 15.3 billion views with over 100 million likes, revealing the explosive traffic power of short-video platforms. Fragmented content precisely aligns with users' "short, flat, and fast" consumption habits, while audience behaviors such as comments, likes, and shares further amplify video dissemination, forming a positive "traffic empowerment" cycle. Bilibili achieved 30.788 million views, while WeChat Video Channel recorded 3.376 million views. These data indicate that in the new media era, cultural globalization must balance platform characteristics with user stratification.

In overseas platform dissemination, Mango TV has released full episodes and derivative short videos on YouTube, a video platform with massive overseas user traffic and strong influence. Among them, the "Hunan TV Mango TV Official Channel" and "Mango TV Slow Life Variety Show" accounts have achieved cumulative views of 13.792 million for full episodes, while the combined views on YouTube and Mango TV International exceeded 60 million. The high engagement from Twitter users further confirms the vibrant topic discussions surrounding the program's cross-cultural communication. The total video dissemination reached 20 billion, quantifying the program's reach and breadth from a data perspective, fully demonstrating its global communication attributes^[12]. These data indicate that the program not only achieved content internationalization but also, through multi-platform synergy, formed a scaled dissemination effect, providing a quantifiable practical case for the international expression of the "Belt and Road" theme.

"Silk Road Season" breaks cultural barriers through "soft communication," demonstrating the program's unique diplomatic value in cross-cultural communication. When visiting a local family in Saudi Arabia, Hua Shaotuan showcased

tea art in traditional Hanfu, while Saudi friends warmly welcomed her with Arabic coffee. This equal dialogue dispelled the stereotype of “cultural export” and won recognition from overseas audiences through “mutual learning and coexistence.” In Croatia, Dilraba wore Xinjiang ethnic costumes and demonstrated Xinjiang dance to foreign friends. Multiple Chinese embassies and consulates abroad promoted the program globally, with the Latin America and Caribbean Department of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Cultural Counselor of the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan, the Chinese Embassy in the Argentine Republic, and the Chinese Embassy in the Republic of Croatia all recommending it via overseas accounts. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin also posted on Facebook with the caption, “Dilraba, wearing Xinjiang costumes and dancing Xinjiang dance, shines with brilliance.” This not only endowed the program with policy authority but also, through precise diplomatic outreach, transcended the entertainment boundaries of traditional variety shows. Overseas netizens praised the elegance of China’s ethnic dances and the exquisite beauty of its traditional costumes, leaving comments that they “felt the charm of Chinese national culture.” The cross-cultural online dissemination data of the program fully demonstrated its explosive influence on social media.

4. Practice and enlightenment of cross-cultural communication in variety shows

As a carrier of mass culture, variety shows need to strike a balance between entertainment and cultural responsibility, attracting audiences with light-hearted formats while conveying the values of harmony in diversity and shared beauty through authentic and heartwarming stories. “Silk Road Season” breaks through the entertainment limitations of traditional variety shows by balancing depth of responsibility and entertainment through a “study tour” model, deeply integrating policy communication with cultural experiences. The program features “compulsory courses,” where Huashao Tuan’s firsthand experiences guide viewers to understand the fruitful achievements of the Belt and Road Initiative over the past decade. In terms of cultural dissemination, the show leverages visually striking cultural symbols like Xinjiang dance and Tianjin clapper talk, as well as egalitarian dialogue forms such as gift exchanges and shared traditional dances, to convey the aesthetic values of Chinese culture and build cross-cultural recognition through emotional resonance. The viral spread of its short video platform and live interactive features align with young audiences’ media usage habits, enhancing the reach and engagement of the content. In terms of content, it highlights the value of production for ordinary people through a “two-way narrative” approach involving content presentation and local residents’ storytelling, thereby avoiding the stereotypical one-way output and demonstrating an inclusive attitude and cultural confidence that respects cultural diversity. However, while “Silk Road Season” has successfully sparked national pride and policy recognition, overseas audiences’ aesthetic and understanding of cross-cultural communication symbols remain superficial. On the other hand, while technological empowerment expands the reach of communication, it also exposes the limitations of “traffic supremacy.” Some overseas audiences struggle to grasp the program’s core message due to language barriers or cultural differences, resulting in a communication pattern characterized by high engagement but low resonance. These challenges highlight that cultural globalization requires not only innovative strategies but also a careful balance between content depth and audience expectations. With the widespread adoption of technologies like artificial intelligence and virtual reality, we must further advance the evolution of immersive communication.

In the face of challenges in cross-cultural communication within the globalized context, variety shows have strengthened cultural identity through creative transformation of audiovisual symbols and equal dialogue mechanisms. To enhance the importance of innovative communication strategies and originality in promoting cultural globalization, three core conditions must be met. First, strategically convey national policies through lightweight formats while evoking empathy with authentic stories. Second, reduce cultural discount through symbolic synergy—appealing to audiences with engaging formats while conveying values of harmony in diversity and shared beauty through genuine, heartwarming narratives. Third, balance localization needs with international expression to avoid self-referential communication. This requires incorporating multicultural perspectives and strengthening collaboration between domestic creative teams and international production teams, enabling content to form a complete ecosystem of “content dissemination—practical

experience—value recognition” through equal dialogue and technological innovation, thus serving as a bridge connecting different cultural contexts. Meanwhile, with the widespread adoption of technologies like artificial intelligence and virtual reality, programs can deepen audience understanding of Chinese culture through interactive VR experiences. By integrating technology with local cultural elements, China’s unique cultural charm can shine brightly in the global exchange of civilizations.

Disclosure statement

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