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ANALYSIS ON THE CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION OF DOCUMENTARY IN CHINA

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the intricate process through which Chinese documentaries navigate cultural boundaries and adapt their communication strategies to achieve resonance with audiences outside China. The analysis will focus on identifying key factors that influence the effectiveness of these cross-cultural communication efforts, including content quality, narrative strategies, and audience engagement. By examining how Chinese media content is tailored for global audiences and evaluating the impact of these adaptations on communication effectiveness, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of international media exchange. The research problem addressed in this study is therefore multifaceted. It involves understanding how Chinese documentaries adapt their communication strategies to effectively engage with international audiences while maintaining their cultural integrity. This study will fill a crucial gap in the existing literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing cross-cultural communication in Chinese documentaries and assessing their effectiveness in bridging cultural divides.

Introduction

Under the trend of globalization, the deepening of economic and cultural exchanges across the globe has led to a heightened awareness of cultural barriers and misunderstandings among different cultural groups. This complex distribution of cultural groups, coupled with the urgent need for diverse cultural interactions, forms the social backdrop for cross-cultural communication research. Documentaries, as a visual representation of human culture and thought, play a crucial role in cross-cultural communication. From a cultural perspective, the cross-cultural exchange of documentaries facilitates the preservation and continuation of distinct cultures and their media through imagery. This process is instrumental in promoting the exchange and enrichment of diverse cultures and in enhancing mutual understanding and recognition among nations.

In his 2014 address at the Symposium on Literary and Artistic Work, President Xi Jinping underscored that the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation necessitates the flourishing of Chinese culture. Culture serves as a vital force for a nation's survival and development. With the growing international focus on China, literature and the arts have emerged as the most effective tools for communication and exchange. These mediums articulate and project the essence of Chinese culture to the global audience, narrating Chinese stories and conveying Chinese voices. This process not only enhances the international community's understanding and appreciation of China but also fosters a deeper engagement with Chinese culture through aesthetic experiences. (People's Daily, 2015)

Statement of the Problem

As a force of cross-border communication, international communication power is directly tied to a country's national interests. Its agenda-setting ability and framework are core construction goals. The communication process and elements of news media, as the most crucial components of international communication power, are influenced by the country's cultural context, with the mainstream channel being the focal point for enhancing a country's international communication power.

The evaluation framework for the media's international communication power includes factors such as content, communication, operation, production, and broadcasting capabilities. Content is the primary factor, and for documentaries, it is the decisive element in their international communication power. As a significant vehicle for China's international communication, documentaries hold substantial value in recording Chinese history, shaping China's national image, spreading Chinese cultural values, and facilitating global understanding of China.

At the national level, the cross-cultural dissemination of documentaries serves not only to export and share culture but also to present a country's unique cultural knowledge, traditions, and consciousness. This, in turn, positively contributes to shaping the national image and augmenting the country's cultural soft power. However, despite these potential benefits, the international standing of Chinese documentaries and their achievements in cross-cultural communication have not been particularly notable. This discrepancy raises several questions: Why do documentaries with rich cultural connotations that reflect Chinese culture struggle to gain recognition from international audiences? What factors influence the cross-cultural communication of Chinese documentaries and pose challenges to their international development? Are these factors related to the production and filmmaking of these documentaries? What characteristics might Chinese documentaries possess to achieve international acclaim?

Literature Review

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party, significant diplomatic initiatives have been undertaken, emphasizing the role of neighboring countries in China's diplomatic strategy, all while maintaining continuity and stability in foreign policy. Concurrently, as China has pursued rapid economic growth, it has also consistently advocated for equitable and mutually beneficial global dialogue based on core values. (Xinhua News Agency, 2013)

Documentaries have played a pivotal role as vehicles for cultural exchange, offering a comprehensive, authentic, and objective portrayal of China and its people to the international audience. However, from the late 1970s to the early 1980s, Chinese documentaries were often perceived through a propagandistic lens in their international distribution. By 1986, films such as the extensive series "China" had been exported over 400 times. Moreover, additional documentaries, totaling 200 works and translated into eight foreign languages, were sent abroad. Despite their substantial content, these films rarely found airtime on foreign television networks or cinema screens; instead, they were primarily showcased at cultural events hosted by Chinese embassies abroad.

The advent and rapid proliferation of digital media have fundamentally reconfigured the landscape of cultural production and consumption on a global scale. This transformation is characterized by the increased ability of media content to traverse national boundaries, facilitating a more interconnected global media environment (Castells, 2010). In this evolving context, Chinese documentaries have emerged from their traditionally domestic confines to garner significant international attention, signaling China's expanding influence within the

global media sphere (Zhang, 2019). This shift is emblematic of a broader trend wherein nations with emerging media markets seek to project their cultural narratives onto the global stage, leveraging digital platforms to reach a diverse audience (Sreberny, 2013).

The rise of Chinese documentaries on the international stage reflects a strategic effort to enhance China's soft power and cultural diplomacy. Historically, Chinese media content was primarily targeted at domestic audiences, often reflecting the socio-political narratives and cultural values specific to China (Liu, 2018). However, as digital media technologies have advanced, there has been a notable shift towards producing content that is designed to resonate with global viewers. This shift is not merely a function of increased technological access but also indicative of a deliberate effort by Chinese media producers to engage with a global audience by adapting their communication strategies to various cultural contexts (Gillespie, 2018). Understanding the dynamics of cross-cultural communication within Chinese documentaries necessitates a comprehensive examination of how these media products navigate and negotiate cultural boundaries. Cross-cultural communication, in this context, involves the processes through which media content is modified or interpreted to align with the values, expectations, and cultural norms of different audiences (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2001). This involves both the strategic adaptation of content and the inherent challenges of maintaining the integrity of the original message while ensuring its relevance to diverse cultural contexts.

Research into cross-cultural communication has highlighted the importance of cultural adaptation in media content. According to Gudykunst and Kim (2003), effective cross-cultural communication requires an understanding of both the cultural context of the sender and the receiver. For Chinese documentaries, this means that producers must balance the portrayal of authentic Chinese cultural elements with the need to present content in a manner that is accessible and engaging to international audiences. This balance is crucial for achieving successful cross-cultural communication and ensuring that the content is not only understood but also appreciated by viewers from different cultural backgrounds.

Furthermore, the adaptation of communication strategies in Chinese documentaries involves an intricate process of localization and cultural translation. Localization refers to the modifications made to content to cater to the specific cultural preferences and expectations of the target audience (Brislin, 1980). In the case of Chinese documentaries, this may involve altering narrative structures, visual aesthetics, and even language to better align with the cultural norms and viewing habits of international audiences (Holliday, Hyde, & Kullman, 2010). Cultural translation, on the other hand, focuses on the process of conveying cultural meanings and values from one cultural context to another, ensuring that the essence of the content is preserved while making it comprehensible to a foreign audience (Venuti, 2012).

The effectiveness of these cross-cultural communication strategies can be assessed through various metrics, including audience reception, engagement levels, and critical reviews. For instance, studies have shown that the success of cross-cultural media content often hinges on its ability to establish a connection with viewers by addressing their cultural interests and values (Ishii, 2014). In this regard, Chinese documentaries that successfully integrate global storytelling techniques while retaining core Chinese cultural elements are more likely to resonate with international audiences.

In summary, this research aims to explore the intricate process through which Chinese documentaries navigate cultural boundaries and adapt their communication strategies to achieve resonance with audiences outside China. The analysis will focus on identifying key factors that influence the effectiveness of these cross-cultural communication efforts, including content quality, narrative strategies, and audience engagement. By examining how Chinese media content is tailored for global audiences and evaluating the impact of these adaptations

on communication effectiveness, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of international media exchange.

This investigation is timely and significant, as it addresses the broader implications of media globalization and cultural exchange. The findings will not only provide valuable insights for media producers and cultural policymakers but also enhance academic discourse on cross-cultural communication in the digital age.

Research Methodolgy

The qualitative approach in research focuses on exploring phenomena in depth through methods such as interviews, focus groups, and observations. This approach is particularly valuable for understanding complex social processes and experiences from the perspective of the participants. Unlike quantitative research, which emphasizes numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative research aims to provide a rich, detailed understanding of the subject matter by capturing the nuances of human behavior and interaction (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Results

In the current context, where politics and media collaborate to set the global agenda, effectively disseminating Chinese documentaries internationally has become a vital issue for China's strategy of "cultural export" and "enhancing cultural soft power" in the new era.

The internationalization of Chinese documentaries reflects a broader trend of media globalization, wherein content is designed to cater to a global audience while retaining its cultural uniqueness. According to the theory of media globalization, media products are not merely exported but are adapted and negotiated in new cultural contexts to achieve resonance with diverse audiences (Tomlinson, 1999). Chinese documentaries, as a subset of this phenomenon, must navigate the complexities of cross-cultural communication to effectively convey their messages to international viewers.

Recent data highlights the increasing global reach of Chinese media. For instance, the global market for Chinese documentaries has expanded significantly, with platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime showcasing Chinese productions to a worldwide audience (Li & Wang, 2021). However, the effectiveness of these documentaries in achieving cross-cultural understanding remains underexplored. While the domestic success of Chinese media has been well-documented, empirical studies focusing on their international reception are relatively sparse. Research by Chen (2020) and Zhang & Lin (2019) has primarily examined the production and consumption of Chinese documentaries within China, without sufficiently addressing how these documentaries perform in international settings.

The theoretical framework for understanding cross-cultural communication in media studies includes several key concepts. Hall's (1976) high-context and low-context communication theory provides a foundational perspective, highlighting how cultural differences in communication styles can impact media reception. High-context cultures, such as China, rely heavily on implicit communication and shared cultural understandings, whereas low-context cultures, prevalent in many Western countries, favor explicit and direct communication (Hall, 1976). Chinese documentaries, often rich in cultural references and implicit meanings, may face challenges in being understood and appreciated by audiences from low-context cultures.

Additionally, Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory offers valuable insights into how cultural values influence media interpretation. Hofstede identifies key dimensions such as individualism versus collectivism and uncertainty avoidance, which can affect how international audiences engage with and interpret Chinese documentaries. For example, Chinese documentaries that emphasize collectivist values may need to be adapted to align with

the more individualistic perspectives of Western audiences.

The concept of cultural adaptation is crucial in this context. Localization strategies, which involve modifying content to fit the cultural preferences and expectations of the target audience, are essential for effective cross-cultural communication (Brislin, 1980). Chinese documentaries must employ localization techniques to make their content accessible and engaging for international viewers. This can include translating cultural references, adapting narrative structures, and incorporating universal themes that resonate across different cultural contexts (Holliday, Hyde, & Kullman, 2010).

The empirical analysis of cross-cultural communication in Chinese documentaries requires examining several factors. These include content quality, narrative techniques, and audience engagement. Content quality involves the accuracy, relevance, and appeal of the documentary's subject matter. For instance, the success of the documentary *The Great Wall* in international markets has been partly attributed to its integration of global cinematic techniques with Chinese historical themes (Xu & Wang, 2020). Narrative techniques, such as storytelling methods and visual aesthetics, also play a critical role in how Chinese documentaries are perceived by international audiences.

Audience engagement is another crucial factor. Studies have shown that audience engagement, measured through factors such as viewer ratings, social media interactions, and critical reviews, is a significant indicator of cross-cultural communication effectiveness (Ishii, 2014). Chinese documentaries that achieve high levels of engagement are more likely to bridge cultural divides and foster cross-cultural understanding.

Conclusion and Discussion

Despite the growing visibility of Chinese documentaries on the global stage, there remains a significant deficiency in empirical research assessing their efficacy in cross-cultural communication. As Chinese documentaries increasingly gain international recognition, understanding how these media products are received and interpreted across diverse cultural contexts becomes imperative. At the national level, the cross-cultural dissemination of documentaries serves not only to export and share culture but also to present a country's unique cultural knowledge, traditions, and consciousness. This, in turn, positively contributes to shaping the national image and augmenting the country's cultural soft power. However, despite these potential benefits, the international standing of Chinese documentaries and their achievements in cross-cultural communication have not been particularly notable. This discrepancy raises several questions: Why do documentaries with rich cultural connotations that reflect Chinese culture struggle to gain recognition from international audiences? What factors influence the cross-cultural communication of Chinese documentaries and pose challenges to their international development? Are these factors related to the production and filmmaking of these documentaries? What characteristics might Chinese documentaries possess to achieve international acclaim? Existing literature has predominantly concentrated on the domestic dimensions of Chinese media, often neglecting how these documentaries engage with audiences beyond China (Chen, 2020; Zhang & Lin, 2019). This research aims to address this critical gap by examining the factors influencing the cross-cultural communication of Chinese documentaries and evaluating their effectiveness in bridging cultural divides.

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