

Embodiment, Semiotics, and Empathic Communication: Exploring the Specific Pathways of "Beauty in Harmony" to Promote Cultural Outreach from a Cross-Cultural Communication Perspective

Lanqi Feng

Communication University of China, Nanjing, Jiangsu, 211172, China

ABSTRACT

Since China launched the Belt and Road Initiative for international economic cooperation in 2013, China has engaged in multifaceted cooperation with countries along the Belt and Road routes. This opportunity has also propelled the global dissemination of Chinese culture. Against this backdrop, China Media Group has launched the major international cultural exchange program "Beauty in Harmony," focusing on authentic stories of friendly exchanges between China and countries along the Belt and Road Initiative. This paper will examine how the program "Beauty in Harmony" advances the international dissemination of Chinese culture through its format and content within a cross-cultural communication context, drawing upon three communication theories: embodied communication, semiotics, and empathic communication.

KEYWORDS

"Beauty in Harmony"; Cross-cultural communication; Embodied communication; Semiotics; Empathic communication

1 Introduction

In light of the unprecedented changes unfolding in the world today, China has proposed building a community with a shared future for mankind. The fine traditions of Chinese culture serve as a vital source of inspiration for this vision. Against this backdrop, it is particularly important to leverage the role of media in international communication. China Media Group, guided by the principle that media outreach should effectively tell China's stories and disseminate the rich spiritual essence of Chinese culture, has collaborated with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism to launch the large-scale international cultural exchange program "Sharing Beauty Together" under the Belt and Road Initiative. This initiative showcases how the civilizations of China and Belt and Road countries become more vibrant through exchange and enriched through mutual learning. This article recounts moving stories of collaborative development between China and countries along the Belt and Road. From a communication studies perspective, it examines how the content and format of the program "Sharing Beauty" promote the dissemination of Chinese culture abroad within a cross-cultural communication context.

2 Cross-cultural communication in the context of the times

2.1 International initiatives build bridges for exchange

In 2013, China proposed the Belt and Road Initiative for international economic cooperation. The Belt and Road Initiative spans three continents—Europe, Asia, and Africa—and involves cooperation with numerous countries including Serbia, Kazakhstan, and Laos. The Belt and Road Initiative promotes shared development among countries along its routes and serves as an important channel for building a community with a shared future for mankind. Therefore, actively promoting the Belt and Road Initiative demonstrates China's commitment to participating in global governance activities and assuming the responsibilities of a major power in the new era. China is willing to use the Belt and Road as a bridge, working together with countries along the routes to uphold the grand vision of openness and cooperation, and move forward hand in hand toward the goal of mutual benefit. Driven by this international initiative, it will inevitably promote the spread of Chinese culture worldwide and facilitate cross-cultural exchanges between China and the world.

2.2 Media facilitates cultural dissemination

The role of media in international communication is of paramount importance. As China strides forward onto the global stage, media should consistently adhere to the fundamental principle of effectively telling China's stories and promoting Chinese culture in its external communications ^[1]. In the process of cross-cultural communication between China and the world, Chinese media can present Chinese culture to global audiences in a vivid and engaging manner through television programs. At the same time, Chinese media can collaborate with foreign media to focus on creating international cultural exchange programs. The program expands cultural influence both domestically and internationally through its high-quality content and extensive reach across global media platforms. By enabling audiences worldwide to experience the cultural values of China and other nations through its broadcasts, it plays a significant role in advancing China's cross-cultural communication efforts.

Against this backdrop, China Media Group and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China have jointly launched the large-scale international cultural exchange program "Sharing Beauty Together." The program, themed "Cultural Silk Road," invites guests from countries along the Belt and Road to share stories of mutual learning among civilizations, open cooperation, and the collision of diverse cultures under the Belt and Road Initiative. Through on-location footage, live interviews, artifact displays, and cultural performances, it showcases the cultural essence of different nations. By watching the program content, audiences gain a profound understanding of the essence of the Belt and Road Initiative and a deep appreciation for the significance of building a community with a shared future for mankind, thereby writing a new chapter in the exchange and mutual learning among world civilizations.

3 Embodied communication reveals cultural value

Embodiment emphasizes the subjectivity of the body. Embodiment can be understood not only as the concrete expression of emotions and thoughts through the body, but also extended to encompass the holistic integration of "body, mind, object, and environment."^[2]

3.1 Gain a deep understanding of cultural essence through authentic practice

To enable audiences to deeply appreciate the cultural significance, the program focuses its lens on the tangible experiences of ordinary individuals closely connected to China's advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative in partner countries. Demonstrate the value of China's cooperation with countries along the Belt and Road through the tangible experiences of individuals. For example, in the eleventh episode of "Beauty in Harmony," nearly 400 personnel, including naval medical officers, were shown aboard the Peace Ark providing medical services to Pacific island nations. Dr. Latu, a Tongan military doctor who once studied in China, recounted in the studio an incident aboard the Peace Ark that left a deep impression on him. He said that every day, thousands of patients boarded the ship for treatment, with nearly 500 more waiting outside for appointments. Yet the Chinese doctors remained remarkably patient while treating patients. This experience taught Latu the "compassionate heart of a physician" during his time aboard the Peace Ark. The family of Solomon Islands national Colin Rukbat, who received treatment aboard the Peace Ark, credits the proactive assistance of Chinese doctors for the successful birth of their child, "Peace." After birth, "Peace" also received meticulous care from the Chinese medical team. Colin expressed profound gratitude for the doctors' help, noting that this experience fostered cultural exchange between the two nations. The program team highlights the positive impact of China's international cooperation projects by showcasing the emotional expressions of individuals who have gained firsthand experience through these initiatives. The essence of China's outstanding traditional culture is being subtly and gradually introduced through China's international projects. People from different countries and cultural backgrounds have experienced the charm of Chinese culture through China's overseas projects. Just as Tonga's naval surgeon, Dr. Latu, gained valuable experience during this maritime rescue mission from China to Pacific island nations, his account in the studio also allowed viewers from around the world to feel the power of Chinese culture. The program employs embodied communication to make culture vivid and tangible, effectively advancing cross-cultural communication.

3.2 On-site reenactment enhances cognitive experience

The program not only utilizes video footage and live guest narration to present its cultural essence. We will also display specific items on the studio set. For instance, to more directly showcase how the "Ocean Farm No. 1"—designed and constructed jointly by Chinese and Norwegian experts—has created superior conditions for salmon farming, the production team deliberately arranged several dishes made from Norwegian deep-sea salmon in the studio. As the host and guests savored these delicacies, their spontaneous expressions of admiration vividly highlighted the collaborative achievements of China and Norway behind the salmon. Through the genuine reactions of the host and guests after experiencing it firsthand, the core essence of the culture becomes visible. This arrangement allows the program to convey its cultural content in a more relaxed and natural manner, enhancing its liveliness while enabling viewers to intuitively grasp the cultural values underlying the stories. The program delves into the details of China's cooperation with countries along the Belt and Road, guiding viewers to revisit the historical legacy of connectivity along the Silk Road. These elements enable audiences to deeply grasp the core values of the Belt and Road Initiative and better understand the values of Chinese and foreign cultures, holding significant importance for cross-cultural communication.

4 Decoding the cultural core of emoticons

Cultural symbols are products of social evolution, embodying humanity's perception and understanding of the world through language, art, rituals, and other means^[3]. The scholar Ferdinand de Saussure posited that any linguistic sign consists of a "signifier" and a "signified." The "signifier" refers to the sound image of language, while the "signified" denotes the concept of the thing that language represents.

4.1 Cultural symbols convey the grandeur of a great nation

Cultural symbols appear multiple times throughout the program. For instance, the large white ship "Peace Ark" that sails to Pacific island nations, or the giant pandas sent on a mission to Belgium. These cultural symbols build an interactive bridge between audiences and Chinese culture. In cross-cultural communication, the referents of these cultural elements extend beyond their literal meanings. Instead, they are reprocessed into cultural significance by integrating local cultural contexts into cultural symbols. For example, the "Peace Ark" represents more than just a medical ship; it embodies China's proactive advocacy for building a community with a shared future for mankind. Cultural symbols convey the grandeur of a great nation and unite forces for cross-cultural communication. These cultural symbols, cherished by people across nations and ethnicities, embody love and hope, their significance having long transcended the ordinary. These cultural symbols not only serve as powerful evidence of cooperative development among countries along the Belt and Road, but will also become a bond that unites the peoples of these nations.

4.2 Audiovisual symbols convey emotional connotations

Following the conclusion of the story, an artistic presentation will be featured, primarily showcasing musical performances. For instance, after recounting the journey of Chinese pandas to Belgium, the program featured Chinese singer Zhang Hanyun and Belgian singer Tobias performing the song "Panda City" together. These musical performances are all collaborations between Chinese singers and singers from the countries featured in the current episode. The performances by Chinese and foreign singers allowed the audience to feel the deep cultural connection shared by artists from both countries. This was not merely a musical performance, but a showcase of cultural heritage. Music serves as a vehicle for cultural exchange. In the context of cross-cultural communication, the referents conveyed through the audiovisual symbols presented in musical performances extend beyond the mere meaning of a song; they also embody the shared aspirations of the peoples along the Belt and Road. The use of audiovisual symbols also immerses viewers in a rich cultural atmosphere, allowing them to deeply appreciate the cultural value and meaning conveyed.

5 Empathic communication constructs cultural identity

Empathy refers to the psychological process by which an individual perceives or imagines another person's emotions and partially experiences their feelings. Empathy is rooted in the shared emotional needs of humanity and is regarded as a crucial competency in cross-cultural communication, capable of bridging cultural divides within heterogeneous cultural contexts. Empathic communication encompasses emotional empathy and behavioral empathy. Emotional empathy refers to resonating with another person's emotional experience based on understanding and recognizing their feelings. Behavioral empathy refers to the behavioral responses generated on the basis of cognitive and emotional empathy, thereby better bridging identity differences and strengthening a sense of community ^[4].

5.1 Deepening emotional bonds through empathy

The program centers on exchanges and cooperation between China and countries along the Belt and Road route, featuring representative cultural events that have shaped collaborative development between these nations and China. It invites individuals involved in these cultural initiatives to share their stories. As eyewitnesses to the events, these narrators were visibly moved as they recounted their stories. For example, the first episode featured China's support for the Serbian steel project, where nine Chinese experts were dispatched to Serbia to rescue the steel mill from its deteriorating situation. Serbian employees at the steel mill shared on the program that the arrival of the Chinese team saved the steel mill, and their colleagues' lives have improved as a result. Duda Lankovic, Director of the General Manager's Office at HBIS Serbia, stated that the Chinese and Serbian peoples have forged a bond through HBIS Serbia under the Belt and Road Initiative, forming a "steel-like friendship." The program also creates an immersive cultural exchange space for audiences through the hosts' and guests' firsthand experiences, as well as communication methods such as cultural symbols and audiovisual elements. This approach facilitates emotional resonance and empathetic communication, thereby enhancing cultural identity and amplifying its reach. Moreover, in the context of cross-cultural communication, the objective narratives of guests from different countries enable the cultural images of China and other nations along the Belt and Road to be presented to audiences in a more objective and multidimensional manner. This approach reduces cultural biases, promotes equal dialogue among cultures, and fosters a more equitable environment for cross-cultural communication.

5.2 Achieving cultural integration through behavioral empathy

Through the Belt and Road Initiative, China has shared its outstanding cultural achievements with countries along the routes. These cultural values have subtly influenced local people's perspectives, and some may carry these values forward, spreading them to broader spheres and thereby fostering cultural integration. For instance, Dr. Latu, a Tongan military doctor who served alongside Chinese naval physicians aboard the Peace Ark during its mission to Pacific island nations,

had previously studied in China. Learning he could work alongside his Chinese teachers and classmates in his homeland filled him with immense excitement. On the Peace Ark, he witnessed the compassionate dedication of Chinese doctors, a spirit that profoundly influenced him. At the same time, this spirit will also reach a broader audience through the program's coverage of the Big White Ship incident. The transmission of this culture can bridge identity differences and strengthen the sense of community among people in countries along the Belt and Road. In the context of cross-cultural communication, empathetic communication deepens friendship between nations.

6 Insights and prospects for cross-cultural communication in "sharing beauty"

6.1 Presenting a multidimensional cultural perspective

"Sharing Beauty" breaks away from conventional program formats by seamlessly integrating location-shot segments, live interviews, artifact displays, and artistic performances into a single show. This innovative approach makes the content vibrant and engaging. For example, in China's assistance to Mongolia in combating desertification, short films produced overseas clearly show viewers how Mongolia has gradually restored its greenery from severe desertification with the help of Chinese experts. By showcasing China's leading plants for sand prevention and control on-site, visitors can gain a more intuitive understanding of China's expertise in combating desertification. During the musical performance, Chinese and Mongolian singers jointly performed the song "My Forest." With profound emotion, the two singers conveyed the people's happiness at the gradual improvement of their homeland's ecology. During the on-site interviews, Chinese and international guests shared diverse perspectives on desertification management, enriching the cultural narrative in international communication with greater depth and dimension. The diverse program formats showcase China's vision of jointly building a community with a shared future for mankind, highlighting the charm and value of culture from multiple perspectives.

6.2 Expressing a great power ethos across multiple domains

The program "Beauty in Harmony" covers a wide range of thematic areas. For instance, projects like the "Peace Ark" in the medical field and the "Coffee E-commerce" initiative between China and Rwanda in the e-commerce sector demonstrate how diverse thematic areas allow audiences to deeply appreciate the vast reach and profound influence of Chinese culture. All discussions ultimately lead to outcomes that advance the mutually beneficial progress of both nations. Cross-cultural communication has brought China to the world while also promoting the development of other countries in areas such as culture, science and technology, and commercial exchanges. This demonstrates that the Belt and Road Initiative, jointly built by China and countries along the routes, is steadily advancing toward the grand vision of a community with a shared future for mankind. This not only expands China's influence but also promotes the common development of countries along the routes. "Beauty in Harmony" comprises eleven episodes, each telling one of 53 stories of collaborative efforts between China and countries along the Belt and Road. Though these stories differ in content, the intrinsic values they embody remain consistent. All of these initiatives demonstrate China's proactive stance in embracing openness and cooperation with countries along the Belt and Road routes, advancing the grand vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind.

7 Conclusions

"Beauty in Harmony" focuses on collaborative development projects between China and countries along the Belt and Road, showcasing the projects' impact through the micro-perspectives of ordinary people affected by them. From the storytelling of Chinese and international guests to the joint performances by artists from both countries, the program has created an equal space for dialogue. This allows Chinese and international guests to share their stories with greater ease, resulting in more objective and authentic narratives. This not only allows audiences to witness the achievements of international cooperation and development, but also showcases the charm of diverse national cultures. In the context of cross-cultural communication, using compelling stories to promote cultural outreach is undoubtedly a standout feature of the program "Beauty in Harmony."

References

- [1] Wang, S. C. (2016, December 29). Securing International Discourse Power Is Our Generation of Media Professionals' Mission. *People's Daily*, p. 007.
- [2] Yan, R. Jia, Z. K. (2025). Three-Dimensional Reconstruction of Embodied Communication in Regional Image: Theoretical Logic, Practical Dilemmas, and Path Innovation—Taking Shanxi Province as an Example. *Convergence Media*, (03):15-22.
- [3] Zhang, L. Y. Tang, Q. (2025). Consensus Building, Cultural Integration, and Value Transmission in International Cultural Exchange Programs: A Case Study of "Beauty in Harmony". *Media Forum*, (02), 77-80+89.
- [4] Nie, K. X. Yang, S. Y. Ma, M. (2023). Embodiment, Space, and Empathy: Analyzing the Dissemination Logic of Short Videos from a Cross-Cultural Communication Perspective. *New Perspectives on Media Convergence*, (02):14-21.