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Overseas Dissemination of Ancient Chinese Costume Culture from the Perspective of Cultural Confidence

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Abstract

Since the reform and opening-up, China has actively followed overseas costume trends and bidden farewell to the era of uniforms. It has gone through evolution from collective imitation to physical liberation to the advocacy of diversified individuality to this new age, where the Chinese culture of costume is radiant with self-confidence. The culture of ancient Chinese costume has a long history with extensive and profound connotations. This paper, from the perspective of cultural confidence, adopts the propagation mode of '5W' to discuss the overseas dissemination of ancient Chinese costume culture, the specific content of Chinese-foreign exchange, and theoretical approaches in the theoretical framework of communication based on the case of 'American Tour of Innovative Design Works of Ancient Chinese Costume Culture', organised by Jiangnan University in 2018, in a bid to serve as a reference for the narration of the national story, the communication of a national voice and the creation of a national image.

Key words: cultural confidence, overseas dissemination, ancient China, Chinese costume culture.

culture.' [1] Since ancient times, China has emphasised the ruling of the country by ritual and etiquette, a significant part of which has been costume, which serves as an important tool in national governance and an important symbol of cultural development. Ancient costume is a living fossil of Chinese ancient culture, and was once an essential part in the foreign exchange of ancient China. In the context of globalisation in the new era, costume, as a vessel of culture, plays a significant role in 'telling China's stories, conveying China's voice and building a good image of China' [2]. However, the cultural phenomenon that there has appeared a serious isomorphism among countries, nationalities and cities around the world is becoming more and more obvious and serious with the dawn of the information age of the 21st century. Many unique costume cultures are gradually disappearing, and the sense of belonging and identity as individuals is becoming more and more blurred or even missing. Especially, at present, many young people are unfamiliar with their own history, art and culture. Currently, the historical necessity of the protection, inheritance and interpretation of the national intangible cultural heritage has been recognised on the national level, and we are increasingly aware of the urgency of the inheritance and dissemination of national historical and cultural heritage in the contemporary era. The overseas dissemination of ancient Chinese costume culture holds far-reaching historical and practical significance for the international community

to understand and correctly evaluate the role of Chinese culture in world culture, so as to facilitate international costume cultural exchanges.

Toward self-confidence: the historical evolution of Chinese costume since the reform and opening-up

During the 40-years of reform and opening up, Chinese people's costumes have undergone tremendous changes. The reason for this is that in 1978 Hong Kong, Taiwanese and western costume fashion quickly spread to the mainland through film, television, newspapers and other media with the Chinese reform and open policy implementation, which began to convey the latest fashion trends to young people [3]. Afterwards, people tried to shake off the shackles of oppression of how they dressed, and in that period no one failed to notice the popular phenomenon that people rushed to imitate foreign dressing styles, such as wearing 'dacron' costumes, flares, form-fitting pants, batwing blouses, clothes with shoulder pads and so on. It was the first decade of Chinese reform and opening-up to touch the fashion market.

The 1990s is an unpredictable time contrast with the period people experienced in the 1980s. Individuals realised that they could show themselves by pursuing fashionable clothes and pay more and more attention to the costume silhouette, colour, fabric and accessories. Female costume in this period, com-

Introduction

'Chinese nation will not be able to rejuvenate itself without strong cultural confidence and a rich and prosperous culture.' On October 18, 2017, at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China held in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, General Secretary Xi Jinping delivered a report and called the entire party and the Chinese people to 'strengthen cultural confidence and promote the prosperity of socialist

pared with that in the first decade, paid more attention to gentle and sexy feminine elements. Clothes were deliberately made to be tight and short to accentuate the curve of the chest and waist [4]. As for business wear, the shoulder breadth was in its normal scope, and shoulder pads became thin and small or outright discarded, returning to the theme of the soft and graceful female figure, which is an indication that women started having a deep recognition and complete liberation of their bodies [5]. However, compared to women's costumes, the men's went along a different path where men began to pay attention to the relationship between dressing, self-identity and occupation, which means the appearance of men's costume matched the work that they were doing much more.

Therefore, after 20-years of reform and opening-up, the development of Chinese costume and people's concept of fashion had changed along with the more mature and international Chinese economy, culture and ideology. The Chinese people's clothing concept had been physically liberated by the reform and opening up. However, people no longer blindly followed international trends and began to consider their own body and think what clothes were suitable for them. Thus, the most prominent feature of this period was that people began to explore fashion and, during this process of exploration, diversified, and personalised costume ideas and choices gradually appeared. People tried to learn how to use their body's advantages to choose fashionable clothes combining their gender, hobbies, education and other different cultures to make sure appropriate clothes match different occasions, forming independent and characteristic clothes.

At the same time, using the artistic elements of traditional Chinese costume has become an important design technique for people to express individuality. As a result, traditional Chinese culture characteristics are displayed by Chinese and different western media from all over the world. We can see the First Lady Peng Liyuan and Fan Bingbing and other well-known film and television stars' dress choices, where more and more innovative Chinese clothes are recognised and appreciated. People's choice of costume has also been greatly affected. Increasing numbers of people have begun to appreciate the beauty of costumes with unique Chinese national characteristics that

shape their fashion personality, which also forms a very broad commercial consumption market and has prompted people to demand innovative designs of Chinese costume.

In the course of the transformation from a planned to market economy, China has been developing rapidly. On the basis of developing social productive forces, we should meet the needs of people's material culture and improve their material and mental life at the same time. Therefore, it is very necessary to restore traditional Chinese costume culture. In the new era, the concept of free and diversified choices of costume has been well established, and China's comprehensive national power has been soaring in the world. In such a historical background, with the attention and publicity paid by the national government to ancient costume culture, the pursuit and appreciation of the wider public, and the Chinese style costume brands of international influence created by designers and enterprises, a joint effort has been formed to inherit and promote on a broader scale ancient Chinese cultural aesthetics that also integrates the modern innovative spirit, so as to boost the image of China in a new age, demonstrate the charisma of China as a great power, lead the new trend of costume culture in China and the world, and finally develop our self-awareness and self-confidence in costume that have arisen in the most recent period since the advent of the reform and opening-up policy.

Extensive and profound connotations: intangible cultural heritage in traditional Chinese costume

Both the tangible and intangible cultural heritage in ancient Chinese costume, in terms of their historical origin, evolution, design and craftsmanship, have carried an invisible culture representing the brilliant creative wisdom and design aesthetics of the Han people. They have forcefully demonstrated China has a splendid history of extensive and profound costume culture, and highlighted the development of the great Chinese culture during the past thousands of years.

The intangible culture of ancient Chinese costume, as a culture of a higher level built on material and social cultures, is a synthesis of costume culture, artistic aesthetics and ideological concepts. First

of all, as for intangible cultural heritage, the craftsmanship involved in the production of ancient costume (such as the skills of sketching, cutting, sewing, ironing, and trimming, as well as the ornament skills of edging, piping, embroidering, and facing, which represent typical needlework in ancient times) is an important part in designing and creating national costume culture. Nowadays, as the craftsmen of the older generation who are adept in making ancient costumes are successively passing away, quite a large number of unique ancient costume skills will possibly be lost to the world. For this reason, it is imperative for us to investigate and inherit these skills, and try to dig into and interpret the national sentiments and spiritual pursuits contained in them.

The second point is the artistic aesthetics of costume, which involves the spiritual content of the artistic language, aesthetic idea, aesthetic ideal and other aspects of costume, and is closely related to the aesthetic interest, aesthetic standard, aesthetic psychology and aesthetic consciousness of people. Take ancient Chinese costumes as example, not only are their silhouettes, patterns, colours, and decorative techniques changeable and delicate, but also most of them are integrated and symbiotic with the geographical environment of people's lives, folk customs and national psychology, from which it can also be clearly interpreted that the aesthetic forms of these costumes are also the embodiment of regional folk culture.

The last point is about the thoughts of creation embodied by costume in the sphere of ideology. The formation of ancient Chinese costume culture has been influenced by thoughts of creation and philosophical thinking in different historical periods and has thus gone through many transformations in terms of the appearance and style of clothes. In the thoughts of creation related to ancient Chinese costume, the metaphysical and impalpable 'Tao' is the origin and root of all the philosophies, and the highest, the most abstract form of creation thought embodied by costume. Tao has run through the evolution of clothes in history [6]. As written in *Huai Nan Tzu*, 'As for Tao: It covers Heaven and upholds the Earth. It extends in the four directions and divides the eight end points. So high, it cannot be reached. So deep, it cannot be fathomed. It embraces and enfolds Heaven and Earth. It endows and

bestows the Formless.’ Under the Taoist guidance of ‘oneness of man and heaven’, Chinese costume has derived more specific and vivid elements emphasising utility, intergrowth, nature, and diligence in aspects related to concepts, forms and values, on the basis of which the major content of ancient Chinese costume culture is constructed.

Case study: the mode and path of the overseas dissemination of ancient Chinese costume culture

Harold D. Lasswell, the founder of communication science in the U.S., in his thesis ‘The Structure and Function of Communication in Society’, written in 1948, proposed for the first time the five elements making up the communication process and arranged them in a certain structure known as the ‘5W’ model or Lasswell’s model of communication, that is Who, Says What, In Which Channel, To Whom, With What Effect (*Figure 1*). The ‘5W’ model shows that the process of communication is a purposive act with the goal to persuade the target audience, and the five elements are the essence that supports the occurrence of this act [7]. This paper, from the perspective of cultural confidence, adopts the propagation mode of ‘5W’ to discuss the overseas dissemination of ancient Chinese costume culture, the specific content of Chinese-foreign exchange, and theoretical approaches in the theoretical framework of communications and, based on the case of the ‘American Tour of Innovative Design Works of Ancient Chinese Costume Culture’ organized by Jiangnan University in 2018, in a bid to serve as a reference for the narration of the national story, the communication of the national voice as well as the creation of the national image.

The Communicator: the organisation of personnel configuration

Misunderstandings caused by cultural differences can only be eliminated through cultural exchange and communication. To this end, special attention should be paid to the selection and structure of personnel in cultural communication. The audience of cultural heritage and works includes not only those of China itself, but also a large number of overseas readers. Creators and disseminators play important roles in determining whether the art and culture of Chinese costume can achieve a good

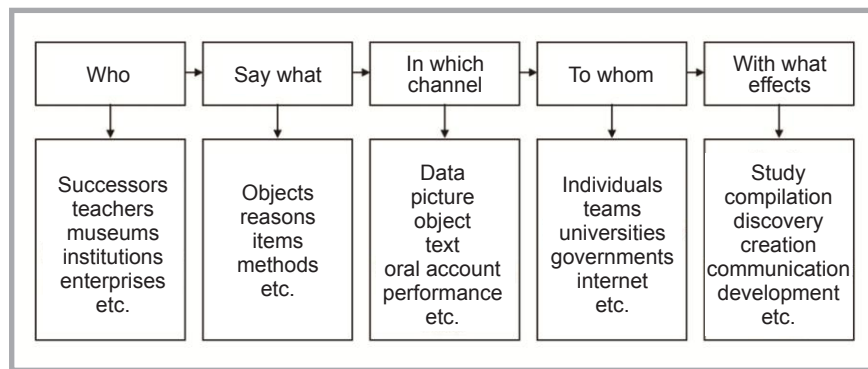


Figure 1. Propagation mode of ‘5W’.

communication effect abroad. Therefore, in terms of the organisational structure of personnel, not only the representative inheritors of ancient costume cultural heritage, such as national and provincial arts-and-crafts masters, but also cultural interpreters such as university professors and innovative practitioners, such as corporate designers, should be included. The ‘American Tour Exhibition of Creative Design Works of Ancient Chinese Costume Culture’, drawing its resources from the Intangible Cultural Heritage Research Base of Jiangsu Province and the Folk Costumes Museum of Jiangnan University, has built a high-level, professional team dedicated to overseas apparel communication, led by experts and professors who have been long engaged in the protection, research and theoretical interpretation of ancient Chinese costume heritage, with provincial and municipal level textile and apparel arts and crafts masters as consultants, and college teachers, students, designers and embroiders as the main force. *Figure 2* shows Ms. Lu Yanxu, an arts-and-crafts master and a young Suzhou embroidery artist, demonstrating and instructing exquisite ancient Chinese Suzhou embroidery skills to overseas audiences.

Content of communication: design and heritage

Ancient Chinese costumes are characterised by exquisite shapes, elegant patterns, exquisite craftsmanship, and sophisticated production. Meanwhile, non-renewable cultural heritage including the techniques used in textile making, printing and dyeing, costume making, decorating, as well as the folk-custom connotation hidden in them, is not only precious spiritual wealth left to us by our ancestors, but also an iconic cultural symbol representing China. In the process of dissemination, we should be

aware that only when we are able to ‘activate’ and ‘regenerate’ the ancient culture, can we truly protect and rescue it. During the overseas dissemination of Chinese costume culture, we need to view ancient culture as the core and modern style as the extension, highlight cross-cross-over innovation across the past and present as well as across ancient and modern styles, trying to integrate subtle ancient needlework into modern fashion trends. In this way, we will be able to weave beautiful ancient clothes into modern life in cities and help promote ancient Chinese culture and the national essence on a broader scale [8]. The ‘American Tour Exhibition of Creative Design Works of Ancient Chinese Costume Culture’ represents such an effort that aims to spread ancient Chinese costume culture and promote the innovative application of costume heritage.

The touring exhibition follows the themes of ‘Auspice – wedding dress with a phoenix coronet and rosy robe, realising a dream about beauty’, ‘Serenity – broad gown and comfortable belt, enjoying peace in serenity’, ‘Rite – shoes embedded with pearls under gorgeous gowns, inheriting a thousand years of tradition of etiquette’, with the specific content of communication having been elaborately designed. The theme of ‘serenity’ is textile-related, showing characteristic fabrics and craftsmanship in ancient costume. Moreover, it displays special fabrics handed down since the end of the Qing Dynasty, such as Song brocade, k’o-ssu, Yun brocade and other precious fabrics with cultural characteristics and symbolic meanings. In addition, through innovative applications in the context of the modern social lifestyle, it demonstrates the practical value of ancient culture through a series of cultural and creative works.



Figure 2. Ms. Lu Yanxu shows Chinese embroidery skills to overseas audiences (The picture was taken in the U.S. in 2018).



Figure 3. Real static display about ancient Chinese costume fabrics and crafts (The picture was taken in the U.S. in 2018).



Figure 4. Academic lecture series about Chinese costume (The picture was taken in the U.S. in 2018).



Figure 5. Americans dressed up in Chinese wedding costumes (The picture was taken in the U.S. in 2018).

Transmission routes: the use of social media

In the process of communication, the media are an important link. With the development of the internet, cloud computing, artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies in the new era, people's ways and habits of understanding art and culture have undergone fundamental changes and human society has entered an era of picture-reading, screen-reading and interactive experience. Therefore, we should actively select and expand all kinds of media to serve the overseas communication of Chinese costume culture to change the singular situation where the Chinese prefer dissemination through print products [9]. Thus, the 'American Design Tour of Ancient Chinese Costume Culture Innovation' was held using VI visual promotion, real static display (Figure 3), dynamic performance, live technical presentations, academic lecture series (Figure 4) and other different media to show a close-up view of ancient Chinese costume fabrics and crafts.

The staff, dressed in Chinese red wedding costumes, explained Chinese wedding customs and culture, including hairstyle, makeup, costume and etiquette, and helped more than 20 foreigners to dress up in Chinese wedding costumes to achieve the effect of true experience (Figure 5). What is more, we also showed performances of paper-cutting, cut window grilles, Chinese knots, lanterns, and other demonstrations of teachings, which attracted more than 500 people. Visitors were interviewed and said that they had learned about real, three-dimensional, interesting and vivid ancient Chinese folk culture, which is the best way for different ethnic and cultural groups to understand China.

Communication target: selection and cultivation of audiences

The target audience, as the final end the process of communication points to, is the key to cultural communication. Prior to the act of communication, the tar-

get audience may have already had selective perception, which is a common phenomenon [10]. In communication, an audience with limited information can easily be trapped by selective perception and thus stick to a stereotype of a nation or culture. Therefore, in the process of overseas dissemination of Chinese costume culture, it is necessary to cultivate overseas audiences by different Chinese regions, so that overseas audiences can objectively and truly understand Chinese culture. The 'American Tour of Innovative Design Works of Ancient Chinese Costume Culture' is for American audiences, including people from the University of California, North Carolina State University and Louisiana State University. It also includes college teachers, students, scholars, designers, costume industry personnel and people from all over the world. Above all, let the audience better understand traditional Chinese culture in multiple dimensions through the different diffusion paths mentioned above.

Communication effect: acceptance and influence of culture

The final effect of overseas dissemination of Chinese costume culture depends on how well overseas audiences can accept the communication works and culture behind them. In the new era, the overseas dissemination of Chinese costume culture from the perspective of cultural self-confidence should take responsibility for cultural protection, inheritance and development, and correctly disseminate and promote ancient Chinese costume culture, so that the world can have more access to and more understanding of the excellent ancient Chinese costume culture. In this process, we should work to promote the development of Chinese costume fashion and cultural prosperity, deepen the recognition and perception of overseas audiences in their the outstanding of ancient Chinese culture, strive to tell the Chinese story, and spread the outstanding ancient Chinese culture to the world (Figure 6). Ancient costume carries profound Chinese cultural heritage and our distinctive folk customs. It also displays the development of Chinese national culture and art, and shows the individuality of the Chinese nation. In the words of General Secretary Xi Jinping, outstanding ancient culture is the ‘root’ and ‘soul’ of the Chinese nation, and renouncing it is tantamount to severing our spiritual lifeline. Nowadays, with the rapid development of the economy and information, we should not only protect ancient cultural resources, but also let more people know and understand these excellent ancient cultures. Vigorously promoting Chinese culture is not only conducive to advancing social harmony and improving national cultural confidence but also to setting up a good national image and realising the great Chinese dream [11].

Finally, in order to effectively understand the recognition, acceptance and spread of traditional Chinese costume culture overseas, this article takes the communication site of the North Carolina State University Station as an example where a questionnaire survey of 127 local visitors was conducted. The survey uses the Likert 7 scale, which uses seven numbers “-3, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, 3” to express the seven attitudes of “disagreement, comparative disagreement, general disagreement, neutrality, general agreement, comparative agreement and very agreement” for visitors to choose from. **Ta-**



Figure 6. Picture of members of the overseas dissemination of Chinese costume culture (The picture was taken in the U.S. in 2018).

Table 1. Analysis of visitors' acceptance of traditional Chinese costume.

Number	Questions	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation
1	Are you willing to try cultural products with Chinese characteristics?	1.36	1.24
2	Would you like to recommend Chinese style clothes to others?	1.65	1.14
3	Are you willing to buy or wear Chinese style clothes?	1.66	1.17
4	Are you willing to buy clothes with Chinese characteristics for your family or friends?	1.67	1.17
5	Would you like to know more about Chinese culture after this exhibition?	2.04	1.06
6	Would you like to learn a traditional Chinese costume technique after this exhibition?	2.05	0.99

ble 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of the selection results. It can be clearly seen that the overall promotion and display of Chinese cultural products in the exhibition was relatively successful, which aroused the interest of foreign visitors and won a high rating. The visitors said that if they choose cultural products in the future, they are willing to try Chinese-style costume and other characteristic products and buy them for themselves and their families. A small number of people have a low preference for characteristic Chinese products, which shows that they pay some attention to traditional Chinese techniques, but their willingness to buy is not stimulated. The reason may be related to their own cognition, contact opportunities and purchasing experience of cultural innovative design works. In the course of the exhibition, most of the foreign visitors showed a strong interest in traditional costume and skills and have a certain expectation for the innovative design works. They hope that designers could also design more fashionable, valuable and product-added works based on traditional Chinese cultural elements to modify the products. [12]

Conclusions

Costume is the most intuitive carrier of cultural communication, and a medium that integrates three elements: arts and crafts entities, culture, and information. Since the reform and opening up, Chinese costume has undergone dramatic changes and has embarked confidently on a road of openness, integration, exploration and dream building. In the new era, the spread of costume culture will effectively boost our cultural self-confidence, and the development of costume will effectively promote Chinese cultural confidence. A rising number of local designers, brands, enterprises, institutions, universities, and museums have begun to realise the importance of communication about ancient Chinese costume. Thus, the case of the ‘American Tour of Innovative Design Works of Ancient Chinese Costume Culture’, organised by Jiangnan University in 2018, adopting the propagation mode of ‘5W’ to discuss the overseas dissemination of ancient Chinese costume culture should be repeated. It is thus necessary that we explore the mode and path of overseas dissemination of ancient Chinese costume culture in the new

era, so as to provide theoretical ideas for related art design and cultural dissemination activities.



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