

# Analysis of the Characteristics of Art Intangible Cultural Heritage in Cross-Cultural Communication

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## Abstract

The birth of the cultural concept of intangible cultural heritage represents the renewal of human beings' own cultural understanding, and also opens up a new field for academic research. Through literature reading, audience interviews, research and other research methods, the author has analyzed the characteristics and the important media role played of the intangible cultural heritage of art in international cultural exchanges. The intangible cultural heritage of art is characteristic of artistic aesthetics, cognitive intuitiveness, variety of categories, interactive participation, and cultural sharing, which effectively alleviates the constraints of cross-cultural understanding, cross-language communication, and cross-regional communication. It enhances the effectiveness of cultural communication, and is conducive to the realization of the sharing of human cultural.

## Keywords

Art Intangible Cultural Heritage, Art Communication, Characteristics

## 1. Introduction

In 2003, UNESCO officially promulgated the "Convention for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage", which divides intangible cultural heritage into five categories (UNESCO, 2003):

1) Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a medium of intangible cultural heritage; 2) Traditional performing arts; 3) Social practices, ceremonies, and festivals; 4) Knowledge and practices of the natural world and the universe; 5) Traditional handicrafts.

According to the classification method of intangible cultural heritage of the

Convention, the intangible cultural heritage of fine arts mainly refers to the content related to traditional handicrafts. On the basis of the “Convention for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage”, each country has adopted different classification methods according to their actual national conditions and differences in their understanding of intangible cultural heritage.

The concept of art intangible cultural heritage mentioned in this article is mainly based on the classification standard of China’s “National Intangible Cultural Heritage List”, which mainly includes all the “traditional arts” in the list and the related arts and crafts in “traditional skills”. Because both of them have the attributes of art and are visual art forms that can be seen and touched, they are established as the specific research content of the intangible cultural heritage of art in this paper. In addition, Wang’s article on the classification method of thirteen categories of intangible cultural heritage (Wang, 2013: pp. 259-264), Yuan Li, Gu Jun’s seven-point method (Yuan & Gu, 2017: pp. 21-23) and Xiang Yun-ju’s five-level distribution (Xiang, 2013) are important theoretical foundations for this study.

As an important part of Chinese traditional culture, the intangible cultural heritage in the field of fine arts has mostly been studied from the perspectives of protection, development and inheritance. It lacks demonstration on its communication function and systematic research. Through related research, this paper sorts out the multi-faceted communication advantages of art intangible cultural heritage, in order to provide reference for the selection of communication tools in international cultural exchange activities.

## 2. Characteristic Analysis

With the continuous improvement of the audience’s self-awareness, they are more willing to choose information content that is aesthetic, diverse, easy to read, and interesting. The intangible cultural heritage of art is an important carrier of cultural dissemination. In the process of cultural exchange, it can effectively alleviate the constraints such as cross-language, cross-cultural, cross-regional, etc., and open a window for foreign audiences to understand the culture of other countries comprehensively, authentically, vividly and intuitively.

This part of the content analyzes the cultural dissemination advantages of the intangible cultural heritage of art from different aspects by means of research methods such as literature and research. The article summarizes them as artistic aesthetics, cognitive intuition, category diversity, interactive participation and cultural sharing.

### 2.1. Artistic Aesthetics

Art intangible cultural heritage works are visual art, and their aesthetic elements such as shape, pattern, color, line, tone and so on, have the beauty of symmetry and balance, harmony and unity, and contrast of light and shade. In the process of viewing art works, the audience can not only obtain information, but also bring aesthetically pleasing feelings and experiences, allowing the audience to

complete the dissemination of information in a relaxed and pleasant state. It has visual aesthetic artistic value for appreciation. People of different ethnic groups, regions and countries have similar psychological feelings towards “beauty”.

The American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey emphasized in his (Dewey, 1934) book “Art is Experience” that art has a prominent function of cultural communication. Aesthetics is a creative spiritual activity of human beings, which can bring deep emotional and psychological pleasure to people. In the process of accepting cultural information, the audience not only meets the cognitive needs, but also meets the needs of aesthetics and entertainment.

As a popular art form for Chinese working people, New Year pictures are also widely loved and collected in Western countries. Academician Alexeyev, the founder of Russian Sinology, visited China several times and collected more than 4000 New Year pictures; the East Palace Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia has more than 5000 paintings; the Hamburg Folk Museum in Germany has 40; There are 150 paintings in the Prague Art Museum; in addition to the collections in the United States and the United Kingdom (Cai & Chen, 2010). Compared with abstract text symbols, the visual art form of intuitive image can make the audience overcome the unfamiliar feeling of foreign words, and it is easier to arouse the emotional resonance of the audience in cross-cultural communication.

## 2.2. Cognitive Intuitiveness

Visual image is an information transmission system that exists before words and language. The rock paintings of the Lascaux caves in Spain and the original Chinese painted pottery patterns are all evidences for this conclusion. Even the written symbols used by the ancestors of human beings have gradually evolved from hieroglyphics.

The social practice of human beings is the historical process of constantly creating symbols. “Symbols are the genes and codes of cultural communication, the medium and carrier of cultural communication, and the foundation of cultural communication” (Zhuang, 2008: p. 45). As one of the major categories of symbolic languages, visual symbols have unique advantages such as intuition, imagery, and metaphor that cannot be replaced by language symbols.

First of all, visual symbols are more expressive and appealing, which can help people visualize and concretize abstract content. In the process of foreign audiences receiving information, visual symbols can convey a certain concept more intuitively, concretely, concisely and clearly, avoid misreading and deviation in the process of information transmission, and simplify the process of information acceptance.

Secondly, the visual symbol itself is a kind of symbol that is highly generalized and gradually abstracted. This visual symbol is the profound accumulation and historical crystallization of national culture, and has metaphorical characteristics. In the process of visual symbolization of culture, people endow it with spiritual content. Through visual symbols, the communicator’s feelings, values,

aesthetic taste and spiritual connotation can be conveyed. For example, visual patterns such as plum, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum are often used to describe the quality of a gentleman in New Year pictures, paper-cuts, embroidery, lacquer paintings, ceramics and other art intangible cultural heritage works.

Once again, we are entering a visual “image reading era”. Various pictures, images and visual image symbols are changing the way people obtain information with the advantages of intuition, convenience and speed. Visual cognition has become one of the important ways for us to obtain information. Visual imagery fills people’s daily lives today and is the most common form of information that people read, consciously or inadvertently.

The art intangible cultural heritage has the advantages of intuitive, convenient, fast, and visual aesthetic cultural attraction in the way of information transmission. It can arouse the emotional resonance of foreign audiences. Its superb skills and exquisite shapes are easier to attract the attention of foreign audiences, and can alleviate cross-language barriers in foreign cultural communication. These communication advantages and characteristics make it frequently selected and appear in foreign cultural exchange activities.

### 2.3. Category Diversity

The diversity of art intangible cultural heritage resources is first reflected in the fact that it has different categories of items. In addition, owing to the differences in natural environment, human environment and social environment, there are also certain differences in the same category of art intangible cultural heritage items.

Taking Chinese paper-cut art as an example, there are huge differences in the content of the works, the production process, the artistic shape, and the characteristics of the works. It is precisely because of these differences that the art form of paper-cutting has been enriched. Jiangsu and Zhejiang style paper-cut, the style of works is exquisite and meticulous, elegant, exquisite and realistic, fine and smooth lines, the paper-cut technique is mainly “Yang Cutting”, and the content is mainly flowers, birds, fish and insects, symbolizing auspiciousness, good luck, longevity, wealth, happiness and other beautiful meanings (As shown in **Figure 1**). Northern school paper-cuts are represented by Shanxi paper-cuts, Shanxi folk paper-cuts and Shandong folk paper-cuts, which are characterized by roughness, majesty, conciseness and simplicity (As shown in **Figure 2**). Paper-cut themes are mostly derived from common things in life, through homophony, symbolism and other techniques to form an allegorical artistic picture.

Mr. Guo Moruo once described the style and characteristics of paper-cutting in the north and the south: “I have seen the window decorations in the north, and their taste is innocent and honest. Now I see the paper-cuts in the south, and they are exquisitely carved” (Zhu, 2010: p. 32).



**Figure 1.** Butterflies Linger over Flowers (author: Jun Zhang, Nanjing).



**Figure 2.** Waiting for You to Grow Up (author: Shandong Zhang, Taiyuan).

In cultural foreign exchange activities, the intangible cultural heritage of art can give full play to the characteristics and advantages of variety and richness. We can choose the content of the dissemination according to the interests and different needs of foreign audiences. In this way, it will bring different visual experiences, feel the rich and colorful charm of culture and art, and further deepen the understanding of Chinese cultural and regional aesthetics, customs, and cultural values.

#### 2.4. Interactive Participation

Participation, interaction and experience are the unique advantages of art intangible cultural heritage compared with other art categories. In cultural foreign exchange activities, inheritors of the intangible cultural heritage of art can display their skills at the event site. Foreign audiences can not only have a more intuitive understanding of the creation process of art works, close contact and rich tactile experience, but also have face-to-face communication with the inheritors (Wang, 2012).

In cultural exchanges, exhibition works can also be created on the spot according to the needs and interests of foreign audiences. Because of the addition of learning and experience links, they can learn and experience related production skills in person, thereby increasing the fun and participation in the process of cultural dissemination, and deepening the audience's understanding and cognition of traditional craft culture. Through the interactive participation of activities, the phenomenon of "cultural discount" in the communication process can be minimized, and then the ambiguity and misunderstanding in the communication process can be eliminated. In the process of learning and production, the audience will devote themselves to their emotion and achieve direct communication to the hearts of foreign audiences, so as to arouse foreign audiences' interest and love for other countries' cultures, and to achieve extensive and effective cultural dissemination.

Most of the intangible cultural heritage works of art are hand-finished works. After a short period of study, foreign audiences can create works of art, the learning results are easy to show, the production process is simple, and it is easy to get started. These characteristics can give them a sense of achievement in the learning process, thereby increasing the audience's learning interest and enthusiasm. Artistic creation is an activity with individual characteristics. In the process of participating in the experience, foreign audiences can fully create according to their own preferences. During the whole process, people will unconsciously inject their own emotion, arousing the pursuit of beauty in their hearts. This kind of emotion can cross cultural and cognitive differences and is a shared emotion among human beings. Such emotion provides the possibility to break through the estrangement between cultures, so that cultural dissemination can be carried out in a pleasant and relaxed state. Works of art with human emotion are warm and direct reflections of the intimate relationship between people and works (Zou, 2014).

## **2.5. Cultural Sharing**

In October 1989, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) pointed out that intangible cultural heritage is the common heritage of mankind. This shows that the same skill, the same festival, and the same performance in the intangible cultural heritage can be shared by different nations and groups in different time and space.

Sharing mainly means that the intangible cultural heritage resources of art can be shared, inherited, declared and held by different countries, groups and ethnic groups. Intangible cultural heritage embodies the collective wisdom of the working people. It is an art form that is collectively created, developed, shared and inherited by the general public. It absorbs and accumulates the wisdom of the group and shows the characteristics of cultural sharing.

Throughout the history of the development of human art, we can find many examples of intangible cultural projects in the fine arts interacting with each

other and sharing the world. For example, Vietnamese New Year pictures are directly influenced by Chinese New Year pictures. The artistic expressions of some Vietnamese New Year pictures are very similar to those of China's Tao Hua Wu New Year pictures. Traces of Chinese New Year pictures can also be found in the early Japanese "Ukiyo-e" art works (Cai & Chen, 2010: p. 298). In countries and regions where Islam is prevalent, mosque ceilings and altars decorated with Chinese porcelain can also be seen. As early as the 13th century, Chinese shadow play art spread to Persia, Arabia, Turkey and other countries and regions following the Mongolian army of the Yuan Dynasty.

"The number of people sharing information is often proportional to the effect and value of information dissemination" (Tian, 2009: p. 90). Sharedness can form a diffuse and broad effect in the dissemination of culture and art, and expand the coverage of dissemination. From the perspective of the development of human culture and art, sharing is also the purpose and purpose of maintaining and promoting cultural prosperity and development, and it has broader and far-reaching significance. The cultural sharing between different countries and different groups will enrich the content of their own culture, enhance the cultural identity between each other, and then be conducive to the unity and harmony among multi-ethnic and multi-national countries.

### 3. Conclusion

To sum up, carrying out cultural foreign exchange activities with the help of intangible cultural heritage of art may give full play to its artistic advantages and functions, enable foreign audiences to achieve visual, pleasant and independent cultural cognition, and enhance emotional awareness. Carrying out cultural foreign exchange activities with the help of art intangible cultural heritage can play its important role. The historical facts of the continuous development and renewal of human art forms have proved that international exchanges and dissemination with the help of culture and art will facilitate the cross-border and cross-ethnic exchanges of national cultures, and can forge the continuous integration and development of world cultures.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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