

Research on the Cultural Program *Dancing Millennium* from Ritual View of Communication

Longguo Tian, Mengyao Wu

College of Design and Art, Shaanxi University of Science and Technology, Xi'an, China

Email: mlbsabc@sina.com

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Abstract

By taking “Plot + Dance” as the form, and “Chinese dance, Chinese story” as the core, the *Dancing Millennium* carries the depth of traditional culture and dance art in the contemporary cultural context under the view of diverse and integrated national culture, provides a sacred ritual place for Chinese people of different nationalities but with common beliefs, and jointly constructs the collective memory and cultural identity of the Chinese nation. Based on the ritual view of communication, this paper discusses how *Dancing Millennium* can create the emotional interaction between the audience and the content of the program on the basis of the innovation of highly cohesive cultural content and entertainment in the immersive field.

Keywords

Ritual View of Communication, Cultural Program, *Dancing Millennium*, National Culture

1. Introduction

Henan Satellite TV, which relies on the excellent traditional culture of the Central Plains in the past two years, has surprised the whole China with a series of masterpieces that promote traditional Chinese culture and deeply explore the value of culture and art. The TV cultural program *Dancing Millennium* produced in 2021 transforms the excellent traditional culture accumulated for thousands of years into a visible, tangible and experiential media product. In his book *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, James W. Carey divided communication into two categories: “The transmission view of communication” and “the ritual view of communication”. When comparing the transmission view of communication to explain the ritual view of communication, he said, “The ‘ritual view’ of communication does not directly refer to the diffusion

of information in the air, but to the maintenance of a society in time. Not the act of sharing information, but the representation of shared beliefs (Carrey, 2005).” The central content of “sharing faith” mentioned by it coincides with the meaning of the existence of cultural programs. Based on this theory, the program *Dancing Millennium* presents the characteristics of ritualization in terms of program mode, communication content and communication value, which thoroughly restores and reproduces the generation context of traditional culture, as well as exploring and activating the value gene of traditional culture. Under the diverse and integrated national culture, it plays a role in maintaining the society and cohesion. Therefore, this paper will study the ritualized content, ritual behavior construction and communication significance of the program *Dancing Millennium* by combining the relevant theories of the ritual view of communication and adopting the method of case analysis.

2. Expression of Emotion: Ritual Presentation of Communication Content

Communication content is the core of communication activities. In the era of “Content is king”, TV cultural programs with cultural core have entered the stage of vigorous development. *Dancing Millennium* enables the 5000 years of dance cultures in China to restore and reproduce the historical context of the production and reproduction of the traditional culture with ritualized performances under the ritual atmosphere formed by immersion field and symbolic metaphor. It also conveys the spiritual beliefs and cultural feelings of each individual nation under the environment of diverse and integrated culture, and guides the Chinese people of all ethnic groups to find a sense of belonging in the traditional culture and reach a consensus of value.

2.1. Atmosphere: Construction of Immersive Field

New media technology is constantly changing the way of shaping the time and space of mass communication and the audience’s time and space experience. Through the “ancient and modern dialogue” in the time scene and the transformation of time and space in the space, *Dancing Millennium* creates a hyper-temporal and immersive media scene for the audience, which successfully awakens the audience’s memory of the times and arouses the audience’s emotional resonance in the dialogue of the memory of different times.

2.1.1. Time Scene

For 5000 years of Chinese civilization, it is hard to present the whole Chinese story to the audience only by dancing in a single period, and the selection of the content is closely related to the collective memory to be conveyed to the audience. “Every collective memory needs to be supported by a group defined in time and space (Habcher, 2002).” Chinese culture originated from the primitive, formed in Yu and Xia dynasties, developed in the Shang and Zhou dynasties, and boosted in the Han, Tang and Song dynasties. Its influence and appeal are

unique in the long history of the world. Therefore, *Dancing Millennium* adopts the synectics method in the history, and selects the four great cultural periods of the Eastern Han Dynasty, the prosperous Tang Dynasty, the Northern Song Dynasty and the modern times from the long history, corresponding to the periods of “Foundation-Prosperity-Transition-Development” in the history of Chinese dance. It replaces the whole with parts and follows the clue of written books for sorting out the 5000-year history of Chinese dance. In the topic setting of the first episode of the Eastern Han Festival, *Xiang He Ballad* and *Confucius* present the Confucian culture of Han Dynasty people’s astrological consciousness, the unity of heaven and man, and the great harmony in the world; *Sing and Dance* represents the picture of young girls in spring outing during the Shangsi Festival, and restores the simple folk style of Ta-ge (singing and dancing at once); The swordsmen in the Jianghu use the umbrella as the sword in *The Shadow of the Chivalrous Umbrella* to reproduce the chivalrous heart over time and space; *Zhaojun Departs the Frontier* shows the strong spirit of women in giving up personal interests for national justice and the friendly unity and mutual integration in the Han Dynasty. The original tribe’s “Fire” talks about the worship of ancient people to fire in the great sense of passing down the fire. The dance, as a cultural symbol, is a profound signification process, symbolizing the spiritual and cultural connotation of a period. The dances selected in the four periods are mainly embodied in the traditional ideological and cultural connotation of the values of “Benevolence, Righteousness, Courtesy, Wisdom, and Faith”, family and national feelings, national spirit, and the thought of harmony. In addition, it also includes the modern values of the awakening of women’s consciousness, the protection of the environment and the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind. It is the connotation of the new era that has been continuously included in different periods that makes the traditional culture keep changing with the Chinese civilization.

The inherent consistency of Chinese culture and the cultures of all Chinese nationalities has formed a cultural symbiosis model of pluralism and integration. The classic works of *Zhaojun Departs the Frontier*, the *Along the Silk Road*, and the *Five Stars Rise in the East*, are the representative works of the Central Plains culture that have absorbed the essence of minority cultures on the basis of national integration to supplement the Chinese culture. The ethnic dances, which are different in personality and compatible with each other, establish a strong national cultural identity in the reconstruction of historical memories, arouse the audience’s consciousness of the Chinese national community of multi-ethnic cultural symbiosis, and transform the concept of unity into the common psychological consciousness of all Chinese ethnic groups.

2.1.2. Space Scene

Zhang Fangmin believes that “the ritual communication field provides the participants with a specific time, space and mood, while the field cannot live with-

out the participants' psychological construction and group consciousness (Wang, 2020)." In the ritual communication, the participants depend on the field, and whether the field can take effects mostly depends on the participants. With the interaction of the above two, the output of program culture is be more accurate and efficient.

Dancing Millennium builds a real aesthetic space with Chinese aesthetic feeling by making full use of the real scene. *Sword of the Yue Maiden* and *Peripateticism* were shot in Qianxinan Prefecture, Guizhou Province and Lishui, Zhejiang Province, respectively, highlighting the freedom and leisure of the chivalrous women and the seven sages in the bamboo forest "integrating into the universe" in the space between the mountains and rivers and hidden in the world. The natural and realistic shooting is more conducive to the integration of dance and plot. The dance recommending officer completes the process of ritual communication through the self-constructed psychological situation, and endows the audience with the identity of the dancing officer to temporarily separate them from their real life, and jointly enter the ritual field established by the program, further forming the group consciousness.

Dancing Millennium gets rid of the closed thinking of traditional dance programs on "stage". In the construction of scenes, it makes use of the live shooting to enhance the sense of immersion, builds the historical scenes to create a sense of story atmosphere, uses the props to create a sense of reality in the theater, and adds the post-stage special effects to enhance the sense of science and technology. In the dance section of *Along the Silk Road*, Yingniang walked alone in the Persian desert, and the props set where the Magic Brush Zhang met Yingniang in the dark grotto and painted with it. The Magic Brush Zhang passed through the mural to the special effect stage and found himself in the ethereal Heaven Palace of the gods and Buddha. The three virtual and real scenes integrated with each other to strengthen the space sense of the stage and arouse the audience's ritual emotion at the visual sense level. The self-transformation from real scene, psychological scene and then to ritual scene is completed in the space field to improve the audience's acceptance of dance.

2.2. Metaphor: Cultural Representation in Symbols

The media represents the "cohesive structure" in cultural memory through specific symbols, and becomes an important carrier for recording the current cultural memory. By encoding the audio-visual symbols of historical experience, the cultural memory can be reproduced in film and television and stored for a long time. The *Dancing Millennium* aims to tell the story of China for five thousand years with Chinese dance. In order to show the whole history in a limited space, in addition to the topic selection of synectics method, it shall adopt the symbols as carriers to restore the history in fragments, which enables the audience to have a common sense of experience in the same scene, and get a unified understanding of the meaning of symbols.

2.2.1. Behavior Symbolization

The construction of ritual behavior symbols in the program is more dependent on the core value of Chinese traditional culture, ritual and music civilization. Evolved from the clan system and hierarchy system, ritual and music complement each other and maintain the harmony of human relations in social order. It is a typical ritualized means of communication. As the carrier and expression of history, the traditional culture symbolizes or represents a certain meaning through “a set of common symbols and a set of common symbolic rules” (Liu & Long, 2020). In the four immersive historical scenes of *Dancing Millennium*, from the Copper-Sparrow Platform, the banquets of king and ministers in the Shangyang Palace, the gathering of scholars and wise men in Chen Jichang’s, and even to the train station platform where people come and go, the setting of the four scene symbols symbolizes the change of class, and the transition from the upper princes and nobles, the middle literati and scholar-bureaucrat to the lower common class. Dance can not only be dressed in the “coat” of Spring Snow (highbrow songs in the State of Chu), but also is close to the class inclusiveness of the people in the Songs of the Rustic Poor (lowbrow folk songs of the State of Chu). A large number of figurative ritual symbols in the program, such as kneeling and bowing, not only distinguish the the king and the ministers, but also the elder and the younger, and strengthen the solemn ritual atmosphere of this “cultural ceremony”.

The program is named *Dancing Millennium*. Dance is the core carrier of telling the story of 5000 years in China. Dance itself is a typical symbolic representation of the history and culture of an era. It is not only presented as the signifier of the symbol, but also refers to the historical imprint behind the symbol. *Xiang He Ballad* was first recorded in *Jin Dynasty Historical Records—Music Monograph*. The dance works in the program was restored according to the Han Dynasty portrait bricks. The girl in the light gauze skirt sang and danced with drums and music in the joy of welcoming the god of spring. The Big Dipper in the sky corresponds to the idea of the unity of heaven and man in the Han Dynasty, and has the aesthetic characteristics of the unity of richness and softness in music and dance art of Han Dynasty. The organic combination of man and plot creates a cultural sharing atmosphere of collective presence. The audience interprets the meaning of the symbols in the ritual situation constructed by different symbols, feel the deep meaning of culture and emotion brought by the ritual, and build the collective memory and cultural identity according to the meaning direction provided by the symbols.

2.2.2. Item Symbolization

The national-level cultural relics shown in the program not only increase the attractiveness of the program, but also serve as a symbol to gather the emotion and strength of the nation in the process of recombining the extensive and profound historical and cultural code of the Chinese nation. Cultural relics symbolize cultural symbols and memory symbols. This metaphorical relationship is externa-

lized through narration and implies symbols as a pan-spiritual metaphor, so as to extend the time and space of memory, connect the ancient and the present and observe the present (Tang & Wen, 2020). The program includes the figurative cultural symbols such as the painted bricks of Seven-plate Dance in the Eastern Han Dynasty, the painted pottery basin of Majiayao culture, the Qin wooden slippers of Heifu's family letters in the Shuihudi, and the brocade armband in the Han Dynasty. These artifacts are the symbols that witness the 5000 years of Chinese history. As the cultural symbols, they have their own signifier, signified and signification, for example, the brocade armband in Han Dynasty. The signifier of cultural symbols can refer to the Han Dynasty cultural relics brocade woven with the words Five Stars Rise in the East. From this, the meaning of the words "Five Stars Rise in the East, Benefit China" is extended to symbolize good luck. The Silk Road of Han Dynasty strengthened the trade between the Central Plains and the Western Regions. On the basis of its signifier and signified, the signification of brocade armband refers to the recognition and yearning of the Western Regions for the culture of the Central Plains. Chinese culture has been circulated widely and is deeply rooted in the ideology of all ethnic groups, which is highly historical and national.

There are also many symbolic cultural symbols in the physical props in the ritual scenes. They also play a part in the construction of the program's ritual significance as a tool to express the specific cultural thoughts of the program. In *The Commoner*, the Reba drum is used as a symbolic symbol to construct the current ritual situation and pass it on to the younger generation of Reba people. The process of transmission is not only about a drum, but also the signification to convey the spirit of Reba and the reverence for life. It brings the audience's emotions into the current ritual experience and establishes the same emotional exchange with the plot. As a cultural supporting tool, props connect the emotions of the real world and the ritual world through the ideographic function of specific objects, which will arouse the audience's emotional resonance.

3. Normative System: Construction of Ritual Behavior

Roy Rappaport believes that ritual has a certain degree of formality. And Eric Rothenbuhler, an American media sociologist, also believes that ritual behavior is a patterned behavior rather than a way of expression (Couldry, 2016). As a cultural program, when presented to the public, it shall first construct an exclusive ritual for the audience, and then it will have a ritualized communication. Therefore, the program will form the "order" of the program according to its internal logic to make the program run. And it will guide the audience to be subtly influenced by the ritual when watching the program and finally hold the belief of the ritual.

3.1. Group: Identity Construction of Dance Recommending Officer

The core of the ritual view of communication is "the sacred ritual that brings

people together as a group or in a common identity” (Carrey, 2005). When people are inspired to participate in the ritual, they will have a common emotional experience. This psychological experience allows them to have a collective sense of belonging and a sense of self-identity. The five dance recommending officers have an average dancing experience of 24 years, which constitute the five essential elements of dance: “Emotion, Truth, Softness, Rigidity and Courtesy”. While building the professional identity of the dance recommending officer, it also establishes a group to inherit the dance culture. Under the role of the group, every audience who loves dance and national culture will hold a common belief and pursuit of Chinese traditional culture, and become a member of inheriting Chinese excellent culture.

With the media ritual created in the program, the participants in the program ritual, like the role playing in the performance of film and television works, become the specific roles in the ritual through the signification of specific behavior, and fulfill the mission entrusted by the ritual. In the main plot of *Dancing Millennium*, five dance recommending officers transform into historical characters, and narrate according to the historical background and role positioning. In the process of interaction, it leads to sorting out the dance-related background and the control of emotional tone, and then connects them with narration. Although the program has made a fiction in the plot design, the specific characters are real, and the interaction between the characters also refers to the real character and actual relationship of the characters. In the third chapter, the main plot of the elegant Song Dynasty is led by the well-known story of *The Lion Roars*. With the help of the interaction between the characters, the abstract concept is transformed into the concrete emotion of the people, leading the audience to feel the experience and emotion of the characters more directly with a good psychological construction for the later part of the dance, which will help to enhance the influence of the dance.

3.2. Procedure: Construction of Dance Recommendation Ritual

The repetition of fixed forms in the process of ritual occurrence is an effective way to complete and strengthen the effect of ritual communication. “Only in accordance with the procedures recognized and accepted by the crowd can it be regarded as a ritual. If the procedures are arbitrarily altered or changed, the solemnity of the ritual will be lost (Peng, 2007).” Therefore, the construction of ritual behavior in the program shall adopt the repeated and fixed procedures to establish a solemn and serious immersive communication context for the audience.

The *Dancing Millennium* continues the theme setting of the Chinese Festival series of Henan Satellite TV. It constructs a series of ritualized stories in a paragraph-style narrative structure. Taking the historical timeline as the clue, it is divided into two camps according to the relationship between the characters played by the dance recommending officers with the elements coordination of historical scenes, historical figures, historical stories and traditional rituals.

Firstly, the dance recommending ritual is introduced by the “Divine Book”, and the dance recommending officer gives a summary of the previous situation of the recommended dance, puts the historical background of the dance into the form of film and television plot and plays with the dance. Finally, the dance recommending officer summarizes and reveals the spiritual connotation of the recommended dance and records it in the Divine Book to be voted by the dancing officer. Different contents are applied to the flow of each program in this standard structure, and are executed in order, which conforms to the order characteristics of the ritual. The repetitive procedural construction deepens the impression of the audience on the dance, step by step, from emotion to culture, and the program realizes the sublimation of meaning. Under the standard of the ritual, the audience constructs a collective common memory from individual memory. It will strengthen the sense of ritual of the program and the sense of identity of the program, thus arousing the audience’s deep sense of belonging to the history and culture of the Chinese nation.

4. Common Belief: Significance of Ritual Communication

Durkheim believed that “the main function of ritual is to maintain the community for a long time and stably, strengthen the faith of members and enhance people’s confidence by enhancing the sense of belonging and the concept of subordinate groups of members in the community (Durkheim, 2006).” Ritual has always played an important role in maintaining collective stability and uniting collective emotions. Its time-space construction, symbolic metaphor and program order make it different from ordinary life and construct a threshold ritual space. In such a field, everything is endowed with sacred meaning, which makes people more focused on the current environment and various behaviors occurring at the moment. And create a “collective unconsciousness” to promote the audience to have a collective sense of belonging and cultural identity. Under its role, the excellent traditional culture and spiritual temperament of the Chinese nation to be conveyed by the program will be more deeply recognized and effectively inherited, and the pursuit of maximizing the utilization rate of the cultural value of the program will be a step closer.

James W. Carey regards communication as a cultural behavior more than transmission, which is the process of attracting people to participate in the ritual and sharing the culture by groups or common identities. People pay little attention to whether they learn something new, but focus on the description and reinforcement of specific values and world views in regular ritual procedures to meet people’s psychological satisfaction. Thus, an orderly and meaningful cultural world that can dominate and contain the human behavior is constructed and maintained, and plays a role in the social maintenance (Carrey, 2005).

Taking dance as the carrier, *Dancing Millennium* attracts the audience to participate in the “ritual” through the common genes of “dance” and “traditional culture”, which effectively improves the public’s acceptance of traditional culture and dance art. It enables both the transmitter (the dance recommending officer)

and the receiver (the dancing officer) to share the culture and construct the meaning in the process of communication and interaction. The TV ritual in the programs often breaks away from the literal entertainment programs in a deep sense through ritual behavior and meaning performance, and is directly linked with the social core values. With the continuous practice of the subjective individuals, the ritual will help the reproduction of culture transform the order of symbolic communication prescribed by culture into the order of social power, and thus realize the control of culture over society (Liu & Long, 2020). The programs not only show the self-cultivation and moral integrity of scholars in *Confucius* and *Li Bai*, but also the feelings of loyalty and filial piety in *Guan Yu* and *Roll Call of Soldiers*, as well as the great integration of China's diverse national culture in *Zhaojun Departs the Frontier* and *Five Stars Rise in the East*, which expands the connotation of the symbol, obtains the greater value appreciation and enhances the significance on the basis of the sense of story and mission of the program.

With the continuous integration and development of different ethnic cultures with different characteristics, a Chinese civilization community that is diverse and integrated has been formed. As a carrier of multi-ethnic culture, *Dancing Millennium* creates the collective memory of social groups with national cultural self-confidence through dance, strengthens the individual group identity and national identity, and plays a role in carrying forward Chinese spirit and circulating Chinese culture.

5. Conclusion

There is no doubt that the ritual view of communication put forward by Carey provides a new starting point for Chinese cultural TV programs, that is, reshaping Chinese cultural identity. *Dancing Millennium* is the first step for Chinese classical dance to be transferred from the stage to the Internet. By taking the traditional culture as the spiritual core, it combines with the various programs, and produces an aggregation effect through cultural content and program form in the immersive field formed by the audience and the program, which helps the program content resonate with the audience at the same frequency, and reaches a common understanding for emotional interaction. Dramatization and popularization is a new attempt to circulate Chinese traditional culture "to make the cultural relics collected in the Forbidden Palace, the heritage displayed on the vast land, and the characters written in ancient books come alive (Xi, 2014)". Cultural TV programs will make use of the power of cultural self-confidence and symbiosis to provide continuous spiritual motivation for the Chinese nation community to enter the new era of a community with a shared future for mankind.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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