

From Dough to Screen: Symbolic Reconstruction and Narrative Translation of Gu Family's Flower Bun's Visual Communication

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Abstract: The phenomenon of video communication surrounding the traditional handicraft of Gujia Hua Bun illustrates the profound reshaping of its symbolic system and narrative discourse in the digital era. Through semiotic theory and communication analysis, this study deciphers the operational mechanism behind the transformation from physical craft to digital symbol, revealing how traditional skills adapt to modern media ecologies. The visualization of Gujia Hua Bun has reconfigured its symbolic and referential dimensions, constructing a new system rich in cultural depth and visual appeal. Narrative strategies have shifted from singular process demonstrations to multidimensional storytelling, incorporating cultural heritage, familial traditions, and artistic expression. This evolution fosters deeper emotional engagement, enabling the craft to transcend its original form and resonate with broader audiences. Consequently, video communication not only revitalizes cultural memory but also achieves creative transformation, ensuring the craft's relevance in contemporary digital landscapes. The case of Gujia Hua Bun exemplifies how traditional heritage can thrive through innovative media adaptation.

Keywords: Gu Family Bun-Making Technique; Video Communication Practice; Symbolic System Reconstruction; Narrative Discourse Translation; Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection

1. Introduction

Today, when the wave of digitalization is sweeping the world, the inheritance and development of traditional handicrafts are facing unprecedented opportunities and challenges. As the intangible cultural heritage of Henan Province, the Gu family flower bun,

with its exquisite craftsmanship and rich cultural connotation, has become a typical case for studying the modern dissemination of traditional handicrafts. Throughout the ages, the vicissitudes of life, the change of dynasties, the establishment of Shenqiu, but has not changed its name, Hongzhi eleven years, in the old city of Shenqiu in Henan Province, the reconstruction of Shenqiu County, cut the Chenzhou, Xiangcheng and Yingzhou belong to the county government moved to the present locust store town in 1950 [1]. Gujia Hua Bun, the art of face sculpture originated from folk rituals and festivals, is also experiencing a profound transformation from physical display to video dissemination along with the development of the times. The purpose of this paper is to explore the phenomenon of symbolic reconstruction and narrative translation in the process of video dissemination of the Gu family steamed buns, and to reveal how traditional skills can realize the contemporary interpretation and dissemination of cultural values through media transformation.

This study adopts a qualitative research method, combining semiotic analysis and narrative theory to interpret the text of Gu's steamed buns. Through participatory observation and in-depth interviews, the study collects first-hand information and explores the construction of meaning between creators and audiences in the communication process. The study not only focuses on the technical aspects of media transformation, but also analyzes the mechanism of meaning flow and reconstruction of cultural symbols in cross-media communication.

2. The Three-Dimensional Analysis of Cultural Symbols of Gu Family Steamed Buns

As a representative of Shaanxi folk art, the Gu family steamed bun carries a wealth of cultural symbols. Its symbol system can be divided into

three levels: visual symbols, ritual symbols and social symbols. At the level of visual symbols, the flower buns convey auspicious meanings and aesthetic values through specific shapes, colors and patterns, such as “dragon and phoenix presenting good luck” and “pomegranate having many children”. In the old days, there was a custom that every family who married should put up a few Gujia buns to help celebrate the wedding. Now the family still maintains this custom. They believe that placing a few Gujia buns in the shape of a sub-waisted gourd can make the family prosperous [2]. These visual elements have been passed down from generation to generation, and have formed a stable relationship between energy and reference, becoming the carrier of collective memory.

2.1 Visual Symbol Layer: Symbolic Encoding of Natural Imagery

The visual symbol system of the Gu family steamed buns shows a distinctive programmatic characteristic, and a complete cultural cognitive system is constructed through the symbolic expression of animal and plant shapes. Among the animal symbols, as shown in Figure 1, the dragon-shaped bun adopts the combination of “S” shaped torso and flame decoration, while the phoenix bird shown in Figure 2 forms a unique visual identification system through the simplified treatment of three plumes and feather-like tail feathers. The plant symbols shown in Figure 3 are most representative of the gourd-shaped buns, with the yin and yang double-rotation pattern at the bottom and the “seven-star seal” at the top constituting the cosmological metaphor of “heaven is round and earth is square”. The color system strictly follows the theory of the five elements and five colors, adopting the ratio of yellow (earth), red (fire), green (wood), black (water) and white (gold), and the five Chinese elements are: east - cyan, west - white, south - red, north - black, and central - yellow [3].



Figure 1. Dragon Shaped Flower Bun



Figure 2. Phoenix Shaped Flower Bun



Figure 3. Gourd Shaped Tribute Bun

2.2 Ritual Symbolic Layer: Physical Narrative of Life Rites and Customs

As a carrier of rituals, the Gu family steamed buns play an important cultural function in the folklore practices of the East Henan region. In terms of life rituals, the “dragon and phoenix buns” used for wedding ceremonies are required to appear in pairs, symbolizing marital harmony through the juxtaposition of yin and yang shapes; and the “longevity peach buns” used for longevity express the wish for longevity through the peach shape. In the festival rituals, the tribute buns for the Spring Festival must be decorated with Taiji motifs, and the direction of rotation must strictly correspond to the orientation of the altar; the “Five Poisonous Buns” for the Dragon Boat Festival symbolize the transformation of “fighting poison with poison” through deformation of shapes during the steaming process. Most of the plants in the Gu Family's flower buns are related to folk festivals and legends, and they are often shaped in a realistic way, with the overall shape being delicate, chic, vivid and interesting, and containing auspicious connotations. Peony is the most common theme [4]. Fieldwork data show that the “Nine Phoenixes Striving for Spring”, which is specially made during the local temple fairs, is a unique expression of regional beliefs through the combination of the symbols of “nine” (an extremely yang number) and “phoenix” (a yin symbol). As shown in Figure 4:



Figure 4. Nine Phoenixes Striving for Spring

2.3 Social Symbolic Layer: the Interactive Network of Vernacular Relations

The social symbolic significance of Gu family flower buns is embodied in three dimensions: in terms of gender politics, there is a clear gender segregation in the inheritance of traditional skills. surveys before 1950 showed that women were only allowed to learn five basic shapes, while men could master all the 72 processes. In terms of economic capital transformation, the gift exchange of Hua Bun follows a special law of value. 2018 market survey shows (Zhoukou City Nonheritage Center) that the return value of wedding Hua Bun is about 120-150% of the market price, forming a unique “ritual economy” model. In terms of the construction of cultural power, the Gu family maintains the orthodoxy of the technique through the technological monopoly of the “double cyclone” process (imitations can only carve a single cyclone).

3. The Mechanism of Symbol Reconstruction in Imaging Communication

When the Gu Family Flower Bun is transformed from physical form to image content, its symbol system undergoes a profound reconfiguration process. Media conversion refers to the process of transforming information from one media form to another, and the meaning and form of symbols will change in this process [5]. First, material symbols are transformed to visual symbols. The palpable texture of dough is transformed into light and shadow effects, and three-dimensional shapes are compressed into two-dimensional flat images. Although this transformation loses part of the sensory dimension, it gains a wider communication possibility. The creators highlight the texture of the dough through close-ups, use depth of field control to strengthen the three-dimensional sense of modeling, and make up for the lack of tactile sensation by visual means, such as Figure 5: “Taste of Home” broadcast by Henan TV captures the texture and luster of the dough through filming of Shenqiu Gu's steamed buns by using close-ups to present the texture of the dough through light and shadow effects; and enhances the three-dimensional sense of steamed buns by using depth of field control to

present it vividly in a two-dimensional image. Although losing part of the tactile dimension, with the advantage of video communication, the charm of the Gu family steamed bun breaks through the geographical limitations and realizes the optimization and expansion of the symbolic meaning and form in the media conversion.

In the new media era, the reconstruction of symbols is not only a change in form, but also a reproduction and innovation of meaning [6]. The meaning of cultural symbols migrates and expands. Traditional Hua Bun symbols have clear references in specific cultural contexts, while in video communication, these symbols face diversified audience groups. In order to enhance the communication effect, creators often juxtapose traditional symbols with modern elements, for example, editing the process of making steamed buns with urban life scenes to form a time-space dialog. This juxtaposition of symbols not only preserves the cultural roots, but also gives room for contemporary interpretation.

Further, personalized symbols were introduced into the traditional system. Image creators often incorporate their own aesthetic preferences and artistic styles into their flower bun representations to form a unique visual signature. This may be reflected in the choice of shooting angle, the handling of color tone or the rhythm. The fusion of these personalized symbols with traditional symbols makes the flower bun image both culturally recognizable and creatively individual. It is worth noting that the reconstruction of symbols is not a one-way simplification process, but a multi-dimensional reproduction of meaning, the result of which may either strengthen the recognition of traditional symbols or lead to the dilution or mutation of their original meaning.



Figure 5. Henan Satellite Television “Taste of the Old Home

4. Narrative Translation: From Craft Show to Emotional Connection

The visualization and dissemination of the Gu family steamed buns has not only changed its symbolic presentation, but also profoundly reconstructed its narrative logic. However, due to the change of time and the departure of old artists, this folk art of flower buns is difficult to be inherited in detail, and the difficulty of data organization has put the research in a difficult situation [7]. The inheritance of traditional flower bun technique mainly relies on oral transmission, and the narrative focuses on the production process and practical functions. In the video narrative, emotional expression and cultural identity become the core theme. Through the language of the camera, the creators transformed the making of steamed buns into a process of emotional transmission, such as close-ups of hand movements to show the delicacy of the technique, and interspersed character interviews to tell the family memories behind the steamed buns.

The narrative perspective also shifted from a single skill transfer to a multi-subject dialog. In the traditional mode, the inheritor as the authoritative narrator outputs knowledge in one direction; the video narrative accommodates multiple voices of the inheritor, the user and the viewer, forming a polyphonic narrative structure. In the Internet era, when using new media for publicity, traditional craftsmen can release the process of making their own handicraft products in their accounts and sell handicraft products in the form of webcasting and merchandise windows, completing the realization of cultural and creative products and the output of culture [8]. Narrative space-time has also been greatly expanded. Entity steamed buns are limited by the physical existence of time and space, and the image can break these restrictions, through montage will be different periods, geographical juxtaposition of steamed buns culture presented. For example, the images of pasta in ancient murals are cross-edited with modern steamed bun works to build a cultural dialog across thousands of years. This kind of time and space compression and reorganization makes the Hua Bun culture gain historical depth and global vision.

5. Assessment of the Impact of Imaging

Communication on the Inheritance of Gu Family Flower Buns

Digital technology can provide diversified communication channels and display methods for the traditional handicraft industry, which can vividly display the production process and cultural connotation of handicrafts, enhance the audience's sense of participation and identification, and strengthen the brand influence [9]. As a digital technology application of video communication, through diversified communication channels and display methods to vividly present the production process and cultural connotations of the Gu family steamed buns, to expand the scope of its cultural dissemination, enhance the brand influence, and then promote the inheritance and development. The multi-dimensional impact on the heritage and development of the Gu Family Flower Bun is reflected in the following: Internet technologies such as video communication provide a broader platform for the dissemination of the art of noodle flower, allowing more people to understand and pay attention to this traditional art form. Through short videos, live broadcasts and other forms, the art of noodle flower can not only show its exquisite skills, but also tell the cultural stories behind it, and inspire young people's interest in traditional culture and enthusiasm for learning[10].

However, visualized communication also faces many challenges. The simplification and recontextualization of symbols may lead to the loss of cultural connotations. When the steamed bun is reduced to a visual spectacle, the ritual significance and social function behind it are easily neglected. In addition, the commercialization of video creation may prompt creators to cater to the public's tastes, overemphasizing the visual impact and weakening the essence of skills. How to realize innovative expression while maintaining cultural authenticity has become a key issue in video communication.

To address these challenges, a multi-party quality control mechanism needs to be established. Cultural scholars can provide content guidance to ensure the accuracy of symbolic interpretation; inheritors should participate in the creative process to ensure the professionalism of the presentation of skills; and communication platforms need to assume

cultural responsibility to avoid excessive entertainment. Only through the synergy of multiple subjects can we realize the balance between the cultural value and market value of the Gu Family Flower Bun's visualization and dissemination.

6. Conclusion

The visualization and dissemination of the Gu family's flower buns show the innovative path of traditional handicrafts in the digital era. Through symbolic reconstruction and narrative translation, this ancient skill can be revitalized in the new media environment. The study found that successful video communication is not a simple media conversion, but a profound cultural adaptation process, which needs to embrace innovative expression while maintaining cultural roots. Future research could further explore the differences in the acceptance of images of traditional handicrafts by different audience groups, as well as the impact of new technologies such as artificial intelligence on cultural communication. The case of the Gu Family Flower Bun provides useful insights into the digital preservation and dissemination of intangible cultural heritage, highlighting the enduring vitality of traditional culture in modern society.

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