Article

Hatching a "Feathered Nezha": Student-Driven Strategies for Branding the Yellow Sea Wetlands through English Expertise

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Abstract: Based on the theories of multimodal discourse analysis, cultural symbols, and cross-cultural communication, this paper constructs a cross-cultural communication model of "Feathered Nezha" with the aim of enhancing the international influence of the Yellow Sea Wetlands. This model realizes the contemporary reconstruction of traditional cultural symbols through a three-fold transformation mechanism: Firstly, it deconstructs the rebellious spirit in the Nezha myth and integrates it with the narrative of the struggle against the ecological crisis of migratory birds, endowing it with the connotation of ecological protection. Secondly, it employs multimodal translation strategies to establish a cross-media narrative system, thereby enhancing cultural communication capabilities. Finally, relying on the social network of universities, it forms a distributed communication ecosystem to expand the scope of communication. Practices have shown that this collaborative innovation model led by students can achieve the dual reconstruction of cultural identity and ecological awareness at a low cost, providing an effective path for the branding of local ecological culture in external publicity.

Keywords: cultural Semitics; multimodal language; feathered Nezha

1. Introduction

As a key node in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway for migratory birds, the Yellow Sea Wetlands carry the survival hopes of 23 globally endangered wader species. However, the traditional communication of wetland protection has long been caught in a dual dilemma of "data piling up" and "emotional absence": Professional terms such as "intertidal zone area" and "biodiversity index" in the nature reserve manuals have built cognitive barriers, and the one-way indoctrination mode of museum commentaries has led to a continuous decline in the participation of the youth group. This current situation urgently calls for the exploration of a new communication paradigm that combines cultural translation and youth empowerment.

This study innovatively constructs a cross-cultural wetland brand narrative system by deconstructing the symbolic capital of the traditional Chinese Nezha myth. For example, the project team has recontextualized Nezha's rebellious spirit of "resisting fate" and made it a value carrier for migratory birds to fight against the ecological crisis. English major students play a central role in cultural translation, and their language proficiency and digital literacy have successfully bridged the professional gap in ecological discourse. For instance, the Chinese verse "The place where migratory birds return is my hometown" has been creatively translated into "Where birds find home, humanity finds hope", which not only ensures rhyming but also realizes the transmission of the values of the ecological community. The project practice shows that this student-led collaborative innovation model has three breakthrough values: Firstly, the IP image of "Feathered Nezha"; Secondly, multimodal narrative tools; Thirdly, the "dandelion communication effect" of the university social network has given rise to a cross-cultural action network.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study integrates cultural semiotics and the theory of multimodal language analysis to provide theoretical support for the branding practice of "Feathered Nezha".

2.1. Multimodal Language Analysis

Kress and van Leeuwen broke through the traditional linguistics' single focus on texts and extended the "three metafunctions" (ideational function, interpersonal function, textual function) in systemic functional linguistics to the visual symbol system, proposing the theory of the Grammar of Visual Design. This theory argues that images and language are both resources for expressing meaning. They represent reality through narrative processes and conceptual processes. Through strategies such as contact (establishing an appeal by directly gazing at the audience), social distance (controlling psychological intimacy through long shots/close-ups), and perspective (conveying power relations through top-down/gaze-level views), the relationship between the viewer and the represented object is constructed [1]. The framework construction of multimodal language analysis includes:

2.1.1. Cultural Level

The cultural level is the dominant level of multimodal communication, including ideology and genre. Ideology consists of human thinking patterns, philosophy, ways of life, and social rules, while genre is the specific form through which ideology is realized. In cultural communication, the cultural level determines the content, form, and strategy of communication. For example, "Here is China", which spreads Chinese culture in the form of a documentary, reflects the dominant role of the cultural level [2].

2.1.2. Contextual Level

The contextual level focuses on the performance of communicative behavior in a specific context and is influenced by the field of discourse, the tenor, and the mode. In multimodal discourse, the contextual level determines the usage patterns of different modalities and the construction of meaning. For example, the Nanjing tourism website and the promotional video of the Hangzhou Asian Games select appropriate contextual strategies according to the target audience and communication purposes to enhance the communication effect [3,4].

2.1.3. Content Level

The content level focuses on the interactive relationships among different modalities in multimodal discourse and their impacts on meaning construction. By analyzing the complementary, synergistic, or conflicting relationships among different modalities (such as language, images, and sounds), the deep meaning of the discourse can be revealed. For example, the documentary "Here is China" constructs the multi-dimensional meaning of China's national image through the interaction of images, sounds, and texts.

2.1.4. Expressive Level

The expressive level involves the specific presentation forms of different modalities, such as visual grammar and auditory grammar. In multimodal discourse, each modality has its unique expression method and function, jointly constituting the overall meaning of the discourse. For example, the tourism website publicizes Nanjing's tourism culture by means of the representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning of the pictures.

2.2. Theory of Cultural Symbols

Cultural symbols are the carriers of cultural meanings and are indispensable elements in cross-cultural communication. These symbols can take various forms, such as language, images, music, rituals, and customs. They are endowed with meaning through specific cultural contexts and convey the values and spiritual connotations of a culture in the process of cultural dissemination [5,6].

In the process of cultural communication, the role of cultural symbols extends beyond the mere transmission of information. They facilitate the transfer and recognition of cultural values through the processes of encoding and decoding. For example, the animated film Nezha: The Demon Child reinterprets traditional Chinese cultural symbols (such as the image of Nezha and mythological stories) in a modern context, achieving cross-cultural dissemination of these symbols [7]. Moreover, the effectiveness of cultural symbol dissemination is influenced by cultural contexts. Symbols in high-context cultures often rely on rich background information and implicit cultural connotations, while those in low-context cultures tend to be more direct and explicit.

The dissemination of cultural symbols also involves the processes of encoding and decoding. During the encoding stage, cultural symbols need to be designed and presented in ways that are appropriate for audiences from different cultural backgrounds. In the decoding stage, audiences interpret the symbols based on their own cultural backgrounds and cognitive frameworks. This process may lead to misinterpretations or cultural discounting, so it is necessary to enhance the effectiveness of symbol dissemination through multi-layered presentation and interactive mechanisms.

3. Case Study: The Practice of Brand Incubation for the "Feathered Nezha" of the Yellow Sea Wetland Driven by English Majors

Based on the theories of cultural semiotics and multimodal discourse analysis, this study constructs a cross-cultural communication model for "Feathered Nezha." The model achieves the contemporary reconstruction of traditional cultural symbols through a three-fold transformation mechanism: First, it deconstructs the rebellious spirit in the Nezha myth and integrates it with the narrative of the struggle against the ecological crisis of migratory birds. Second, it employs multimodal translation strategies to establish a cross-media narrative system. Finally, it relies on university social networks to form a distributed communication ecosystem. The practice shows that this student-led collaborative innovation model can achieve the dual reconstruction of cultural identity and ecological awareness at a low cost.

3.1. Ecological Translation Mechanism of Cultural Symbols

The external publicity brand of the Yellow Sea Wetland, "Feathered Nezha" , draws on the image of Nezha from traditional Chinese mythology, integrating it with the ecological characteristics of the wetland to create a unique cultural symbol. This symbol not only has visual impact but also contains rich cultural connotations. English major students can optimize the presentation of the symbol through multimodal discourse analysis, making it more communicative across different cultural contexts.

The core logic of IP design lies in the symbolic grafting of mythological archetypes and ecological narratives. Based on a semiotic interpretation of Nezha's "stripping the flesh and returning the bones" to his father, the research team extracted the spirit of "breaking free from constraints" and recontextualized it as a modern metaphor for migratory birds' struggle against ecological crises. This translation is not a simple transplantation of imagery but a semantic transformation achieved through dual narrative anchoring. On the visual design level, the team used anthropological participatory observation to record the working scenes of bird protectors in the Yancheng Wetland. The final design features a hybrid characteristic that combines cultural recognizability with ecological reference — the fusion of the spoon-billed sandpiper's spatulate beak with Nezha's twin buns,

and the functional juxtaposition of electronic goggles and reed prints. In terms of color selection, color emotion experiments revealed that the combination of "mudflat blue" and "red-crowned crane red" can more effectively stimulate the ecological protection intentions of young people compared to traditional environmental protection logos, making it more attractive to the youth.

3.2. Cross-Cultural Construction Path of Multimodal Narratives

To address the "data aphasia" dilemma in traditional ecological communication, the project team developed a narrative reconstruction tool based on the hero's journey framework. Through a corpus analysis of the interpretative texts in the Yancheng Wetland Museum, it was found that the information density far exceeded the public's cognitive load threshold. Therefore, the English major team transformed data such as "protected area size" into first-person narratives. For example, migration routes were described as "my travel diary across 8 countries," significantly enhancing communication effectiveness and video click-through rates. In short video creation, the digital media team innovatively used "anthropomorphic montage" techniques. A 5-minute TikTok video, through visual transitions such as feather metamorphosis and AR ribbon guidance, concretized endangered migratory bird data into Nezha's emotional expressions of frowning and shaking his head. On the interactive level, the WeChat mini-program "Bird Nezha's Migration Quest" was developed. By incorporating terminological Easter eggs (e.g., clicking on Charadriiformes to play English popular science) and multiple endings, it encouraged participating players to actively spread game content, forming a behavioral loop of "playing-learning-sharing."

3.3. Fission-like Communication Ecosystem of Social Networks

The project constructed a dandelion communication model with universities as nodes, characterized by the combination of cultural production and social capital. At Yancheng Institute of Technology and Yancheng Normal University, participatory activities such as term-based physical performances (e.g., simulating tidal movements with the body) and bilingual story relay successfully transformed professional discourse into youth subcultural symbols. The design art students' involvement in cultural and creative product design deeply tapped into the youth's psychology of collecting. The blind box packaging, made of seed paper, allows users to plant alkali grass and then scan a code to generate a digital certificate. This dual authentication mechanism of material and virtual elements increased product repurchase rates. Social media matrix operation data showed that combining the visual creativity of design art students with the narrative skills of foreign language students can significantly enhance post interaction rates.

4. Conclusion

Through the interdisciplinary practice of the "Feathered Nezha" project, this study has confirmed that the ecological translation of mythological symbols has triple transformative potential in wetland conservation communication: First, as a "superconductor" of cultural cognition, the ecological reconstruction of the Nezha myth (such as the design of electronic goggles and AR ribbons) has shortened the psychological distance of young people to wetland crises. Second, multimodal narratives have successfully increased the retention rate of knowledge about migratory birds' migration beyond the impact of traditional education through a behavioral loop of "playing-learning-sharing." Third, the dandelion communication model based on university social networks has achieved multilevel fission diffusion with each participant as a node, verifying the multiplier effect of youth empowerment in ecological actions. These findings provide an innovative path to break the dilemma of "social coldness" in environmental protection issues.

In the theoretical dimension, this study has developed the "Cultural Semiotic Grafting" framework, whose core contributions are: First, it has expanded the application

boundaries of multimodal discourse analysis and cultural symbol theory, proving that the combination of mythological archetypes with endangered species can trigger stronger ethical resonance. Second, it has redefined the capabilities of the English discipline, upgrading translation practice from language conversion to value recoding — the "ecological aphorism library" created by the student team in the project (such as "Every mudflat holds a universe") has enriched the contemporary reconstruction of the Yellow Sea Wetland's external publicity translation texts. Third, it has proposed the "Participatory Mytho-Ecology" methodology, injecting productive youth perspectives into environmental humanities. Students can participate in the design of multimodal publicity materials, such as videos, images, texts, and audio, enhancing the communication effects of symbols through the synergistic action of these materials. For example, produce high-quality promotional videos combining animation, real-scene shooting, and voice-over to tell the story of the Yellow Sea Wetland. Design visually attractive posters and brochures highlighting the "Feathered Nezha" image; write English blogs and social media posts to share the conservation achievements and ecological values of the wetland.

5. Future Research Directions for Deepening the Study

5.1. Horizontal Cultural Adaptation

The current model can test the ecological translation potential of other mythological systems. For example, applying the narrative of the Dragon King as the "guardian of the sea" to the protection of the Yellow Sea Wetland, or using the mythical beasts from the "Classic of Mountains and Seas" for biodiversity communication. A cross-mythological comparison toolkit needs to be developed, establishing quantitative assessment indicators for cultural adaptation.

5.2. Deep Integration of Technology

Utilize AI technology to achieve personalized generation of IP narratives: when users scan plants at the wetland site, the AR system can instantly generate branch stories of Feathered Nezha integrated with local legends. Meanwhile, explore the application of the Yellow Sea Wetland IP image, transforming students' creative outputs into tradable products, with part of the proceeds feeding back into the construction of the protected area.

5.3. Institutional Embedding

Promote the linkage mechanism between "student innovation credits" and the effectiveness of wetland conservation. For example, universities in Yancheng can incorporate communication effectiveness data (such as reach and behavior conversion rates) into the course evaluation system, establishing a micro-professional certification for "Wetland Conservation Communication Power." At the policy level, it is suggested that the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership set up a special fund for youth to support transnational ecological narrative collaboration.

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