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From "Craftsmanship" to "Meaning": A Study on the Symbolic Construction and Communication of Tea Ceremony on New Media Platforms

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Abstract:
In the new media era, Chinese tea ceremony inheritance has seen a profound symbolic transformation, shifting from traditional brewing skill displays to the multi-dimensional construction and dissemination of cultural symbols on new media platforms. This study uses literature research and content analysis to explore four presentation forms of tea ceremony content, analyze the construction mechanism of its core visual symbols and the symbol production and communication logic of multiple actors. It identifies prominent communication problems like symbolic superficialization, fragmented dissemination and excessive commercial encroachment, and proposes targeted optimization strategies. The research aims to provide theoretical and practical references for the inheritance and innovative communication of tea ceremony culture, helping it integrate into contemporary life and attract young groups.

Keywords:
Tea Ceremony; New Media; Symbolic Construction; Cultural Communication; Visual Symbols; Communication Strategy

1. Introduction

The Chinese tea ceremony, as an important carrier of fine traditional Chinese culture, bears the spiritual connotations of "harmony, respect, purity and tranquility" and "integrity, diligence and virtue". In the traditional communication context, its inheritance is mostly limited to offline rituals, professional teaching and cultural exchanges, with a relatively narrow audience and a single dissemination form. With the advent of the new media era, short videos, live streams and social media have become important carriers for cultural communication, and the tea ceremony has undergone a profound symbolic transformation in this context. It is no longer confined to the procedural practice of tea-making rituals, but is re-deconstructed, encoded and reorganized into various perceivable, communicable and consumable visual and experiential symbols through new media platforms.

The essence of this transformation is to re-interpret traditional tea culture in the language of new media, transforming it from a "cultural heritage" into a "lifestyle" and "life philosophy" that can be embedded in

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people's daily lives, and its core goal is to attract the attention and participation of young groups. At present, the communication of tea ceremony culture on new media platforms has shown a diversified development trend, but it also faces many practical problems such as the dissipation of cultural connotations, the alienation of symbolic meaning and the lack of professional communication ecology.

This study takes the symbolic construction and communication of the tea ceremony on new media platforms as the research object, starting with the definition of the research background and significance, and clarifies the research objective: to systematically analyze the presentation forms of tea ceremony content on new media platforms, the construction mechanism of core visual symbols, the collaborative and game relationship of multiple actors in the process of symbol production and communication, and the communication barriers generated in the dissemination process. On this basis, targeted optimization strategies are put forward to provide a reference for the innovative inheritance and communication of tea ceremony culture in the new media era. In the research process, controversial points in the current research field, such as the balance between commercialization and cultural connotation in the communication of tea ceremony symbols, and the reconstruction of traditional cultural symbols in the new media context, are also highlighted to conduct in-depth discussion.

2. Materials and Methods

This study mainly adopts two research methods, namely literature research method and content analysis method, to carry out in-depth research on the symbolic construction and communication of the tea ceremony on new media platforms. The research process is designed to ensure the scientificity and objectivity of the research results, and the specific research procedures and method application details are described as follows, which can provide a clear reference for the repeatability and citation of the research.

2.1. Research Materials

The research materials of this study are divided into two categories: first, the relevant literature on tea ceremony culture, symbolic communication, new media cultural communication and other fields, including academic papers, monographs, research reports published in core journals and important academic platforms at home and abroad, which provide theoretical support for the construction of the research framework and the analysis of research problems; second, the tea ceremony-related content on mainstream new media platforms (Douyin, Xiaohongshu, Bilibili, WeChat Channels, CCTV Video, Xinhua News Agency's new media platform, etc.), including short videos, live stream content, integrated media programs and online activity records from 2023 to 2024, such as the large-scale integrated media live stream "Understanding China: Tea Unites the World" and the program China in the Scent of Tea, which are the empirical analysis materials for this study to summarize the presentation forms of tea ceremony content and analyze the symbol construction mechanism.

2.2. Research Procedures

First, the literature sorting stage: collect and sort out the relevant literature on tea ceremony culture and new media symbolic communication, define the core concepts such as tea ceremony symbols, new media communication logic and multiple actors network, and construct the theoretical research framework of this

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study. Second, the content analysis stage: select typical tea ceremony content on major new media platforms, establish a content analysis dimension from the aspects of content presentation form, visual symbol type, communication subject and communication effect, and conduct coding and statistical analysis on the selected samples to summarize the characteristics of the symbolic construction of the tea ceremony on new media platforms and the current situation of communication. Third, the problem analysis stage: based on the results of content analysis, combine the relevant theories of cultural communication, analyze the prominent problems and their causes in the process of tea ceremony symbol communication in the new media context. Fourth, the strategy proposal stage: aiming at the existing problems, combine the development characteristics of new media platforms and the cultural connotation of the tea ceremony, put forward targeted optimization strategies for the symbolic communication of the tea ceremony. Finally, the conclusion summary stage: summarize the main research results of the study, clarify the theoretical and practical significance of the research, and point out the research limitations and future research directions.

3. Results and Discussion

Based on the literature research and content analysis of tea ceremony-related content on new media platforms, this study sorts out the diversified presentation forms of tea ceremony content on new media, clarifies the construction mechanism of its core visual symbols, and analyzes the symbol production and communication logic under the participation of multiple actors. At the same time, the prominent problems in the current communication of tea ceremony symbols are deeply discussed, and the internal causes of these problems are analyzed from the perspectives of new media characteristics, commercial logic and communicator quality.

3.1. Presentation Forms of Tea Ceremony Content on New Media Platforms

The tea ceremony content on new media platforms is designed to meet the diverse needs of users, and has formed four main presentation forms with distinct characteristics, each of which focuses on different communication goals and symbol construction directions, and has its own unique communication effects.

Hands-on teaching type: Centered on the practicality and skill transmission of tea, this type of content decomposes complex tea ceremony techniques into easy-to-understand tea-making steps through short videos or live streams. It focuses on the breakdown of tea-making movements, the use of utensils and the key points of brewing different tea varieties, which can meet users' demand for learning tea-making knowledge and help creators establish a professional and authoritative image.

Healing slow life type: Taking "slowness" as the core symbol, this type of content creates a healing atmosphere and emotional value through exquisite video images, soothing rhythm and soft background music. It constructs a "spiritual haven" away from the hustle and bustle of the city for users, and binds the tea ceremony with emotional needs such as meditation, solitude and healing, conveying an idealized lifestyle.

Cultural storytelling type: This type of content takes the tea ceremony as a typical symbol of fine traditional Chinese culture, excavates and presents the historical culture behind the tea ceremony, and enhances the depth and style of the content through integrated media programs, large-scale live stream activities and other forms. It can satisfy users' curiosity about tea ceremony knowledge and their sense of identity with traditional

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culture, and elevate tea from a beverage to a cultural symbol.

Product recommendation type: As the most direct manifestation of the commercialization of tea ceremony symbols, this type of content focuses on showcasing the aesthetic design of tea sets, the stories of tea producing areas and the taste of tea pastries through scenario-based display, stimulating users' purchasing desire, and linking tea ceremony symbols with the pursuit of elegant and exquisite quality of life.

3.2. Construction Mechanism of Core Visual Symbols of Tea Ceremony on New Media

The symbolic construction of the tea ceremony on new media platforms is mainly reflected in the construction of three core visual symbols: bodily, object and temporal symbols. These symbols are re-encoded and presented through new media technical means, and become the main carriers for conveying the cultural connotation of the tea ceremony and attracting users' attention.

Bodily symbols: The human body is a medium for the production and transmission of tea ceremony symbolic meaning. Every bodily movement in the tea ceremony, such as pouring tea to express respect and pouring water counterclockwise to express welcome, is a symbol encoded under specific cultural rules. New media extracts and amplifies traditional brewing movements and etiquette postures into highly ornamental visual symbols through close-up shots and other techniques. For example, the tea-pouring techniques of Chaoshan Gongfu Tea, "Patrolling the City like Guan Gong" and "Dispensing Tea like Han Xin Counting Soldiers", become a concentrated embodiment of rhythm and ritual sense in short videos, conveying a mental state of concentration, piety and elegance.

Object symbols: Tea utensils are no longer mere tools for making tea, but key symbols bearing the aesthetics and culture of the tea ceremony. In the new media era, the material, shape and glaze color of tea utensils are endowed with specific cultural connotations. New media displays the texture and quality of tea utensils in detail through macro photography and light and shadow design, making them aesthetic objects worthy of collection and display. For example, the pattern of "the Unity of Zen and Tea in Jingshan" applied to tea utensils and costumes embodies the philosophical connotation of the tea ceremony of "harmony, respect, purity and tranquility".

Temporal symbols: New media intentionally highlights the connection between the tea ceremony and traditional Chinese solar terms and time concepts in its presentation. On the one hand, it uses slow-motion and long shots to show the entire process of tea brewing, symbolizing the "slow pace" to counter the fast rhythm of modern society; on the other hand, it deeply binds tea drinking with the twenty-four solar terms and traditional festivals, launching seasonal tea ceremony content such as "Spring Tea Banquet" and "Tea Boiling on the Winter Solstice", creating a way of perceiving time with classical charm and making the tea ceremony integrate with the concept of following the natural laws.

3.3. Symbol Production and Communication under the Logic of Multiple Actors and Platforms

The symbolic construction and communication of the tea ceremony on new media platforms is a typical practice of the "multiple actors network", in which different actors participate with their own resources, moti-

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vations and discourse strategies, forming a symbol production field with cooperation, competition and game relationships. At the same time, the traffic rules and algorithm logic of new media platforms play a leading role in this process, which "disciplines" the production and presentation of tea ceremony symbols.

Official and cultural institutions: As the definers of cultural authority and shapers of mainstream narratives, government departments, intangible cultural heritage protection institutions and tea industry associations focus on ensuring the "orthodoxy" and "cultural security" of tea ceremony symbols. They construct a systematic and historical symbolic system through high-definition documentaries, intangible cultural heritage live streams and online tea culture festivals, but their relatively rigid narrative methods sometimes conflict with the entertaining and fragmented characteristics of new media, so they have to make limited compromises such as cooperating with internet celebrities.

Platform enterprises: As the rule-makers and traffic distributors of new media, platforms such as Douyin and Xiaohongshu are not neutral. They stipulate "which tea ceremony symbols are visible" and "how they are visible" through algorithms, community rules and commercial policies. Platforms tend to favor content with strong visual impact and emotional resonance, which directly leads to the visualization of tea ceremony symbols, and also launch relevant topic challenges to decompose the tea ceremony into "modular symbols" suitable for imitation and communication.

Professional content creators: Tea science teachers, young tea practitioners and traditional culture self-media bloggers are the key "translators" of tea ceremony culture. They have both professional tea ceremony knowledge and new media literacy, and translate profound tea ceremony techniques and philosophical concepts into content popular among users. They also innovate the presentation form of tea ceremony symbols by embedding them into daily life scenes and combining them with subcultures such as Hanfu and e-sports, expanding the audience of the tea ceremony.

Ordinary users and consumers: Users are not only the audience of tea ceremony content, but also active negotiators and co-creators of symbolic meaning. They participate in the communication of tea ceremony symbols through liking, commenting, sharing and secondary creation, and the comment section has become a "public forum" for the discussion of tea ceremony symbolic meaning. In addition, users' purchase behavior of tea-related products directly feeds back to the market and algorithms, and reversely shapes the reproduction of tea ceremony symbols.

3.4. Prominent Problems in the Communication of Tea Ceremony Symbols in the New Media Context

The communication of tea ceremony symbols on new media platforms has achieved certain results, but due to the characteristics of new media itself and the influence of commercial logic, it also faces a series of prominent problems that affect the inheritance and dissemination of tea ceremony culture, and even lead to the crisis of tea ceremony symbols such as meaning alienation and stigmatization.

Superficialization of symbols and dissipation of connotations: The fragmented, visual and entertaining characteristics of new media dismember the complete context required for the interpretation of tea ceremony symbols. A large number of tea ceremony content only stays at the superficial display of aesthetic utensils and

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slow life scenes, over-focusing on the form of the tea ceremony and ignoring its profound historical and philosophical heritage, making tea ceremony symbols become empty visual labels or consumption symbols.

Fragmentation of communication and narrative disruption: New media decomposes the complete tea ceremony cultural system into isolated "points" such as a certain movement or a certain tea utensil, and most short video content lacks systematic and in-depth narration of the tea ceremony's historical origins, etiquette norms and philosophical thoughts, leading to users' one-sided cognition and misinterpretation of tea ceremony culture.

Excessive encroachment of commercial logic and symbol alienation: The close binding of new media platforms with traffic and consumerism makes some communicators deliberately link the tea ceremony with luxury goods, social status and social comparison for commercial interests. For example, hyping the sky-high price of scarce tea and the investment value of tea utensils distorts the value orientation of the tea ceremony advocating introspection, peace and simplicity, and alienates the symbolic meaning of the tea ceremony.

Uneven literacy of communicators and lack of authority: New media has lowered the threshold of content creation, and a large number of creators lacking professional tea ceremony knowledge have participated in content production, leading to the spread of wrong information and arbitrary adaptation of tea culture. At the same time, professional scholars and intangible cultural heritage inheritors are unfamiliar with new media content production, and their voices are weak in the new media field, resulting in the lack of a professional communication ecology.

Distortion and stigmatization of symbolic meaning: The phenomenon of "signifier drift" of tea ceremony symbols is serious in the new media context. Taking "green tea" as an example, it has evolved from an elegant tea type into a derogatory label for a specific group of women, and "tea artist" is simplified as a "performer in a cheongsam". This stigmatization is the result of the collusion between consumerism and gender discipline, which dissolves the core connotation of tea culture of "purity" and "elegance".

One-way communication link and feedback failure: A large number of tea ceremony culture communication still follows the elitist and one-way indoctrination model, which is incompatible with the equal and interactive characteristics of new media. This not only makes the official and professional discourse lose its voice in the mainstream public opinion field, but also fails to form an effective communication feedback loop, making it impossible to timely respond to users' real cognition and emotional needs of tea ceremony culture.

4. Conclusions

This study systematically analyzes the symbolic construction and communication of the tea ceremony on new media platforms through literature research and content analysis, and draws the following core conclusions, which clarify the development characteristics, existing problems and optimization paths of tea ceremony culture communication in the new media era, and have important theoretical and practical significance for the innovative inheritance of fine traditional Chinese culture.

First, the communication of the tea ceremony on new media platforms has realized the transformation from "craftsmanship" to "meaning", and formed a diversified content presentation system with four main types:

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hands-on teaching, healing slow life, cultural storytelling and product recommendation. This transformation makes the tea ceremony break through the limitations of traditional offline communication, and realize the popularization and dailyization of cultural communication, which is conducive to the integration of tea ceremony culture into contemporary life and the attraction of young groups.

Second, the core visual symbols of the tea ceremony on new media platforms are mainly composed of bodily, object and temporal symbols, which are re-encoded and presented through new media technical means such as close-up shots and macro photography. These symbols are the main carriers for conveying the cultural connotation of the tea ceremony, and their construction mechanism is closely combined with the technical characteristics of new media and the cultural connotation of the tea ceremony, reflecting the innovative expression of traditional cultural symbols in the new media context.

Third, the symbolic production and communication of the tea ceremony on new media is a joint action of multiple actors, and the platform logic plays a leading role in this process. The cooperation and game between official cultural institutions, platform enterprises, professional creators and ordinary users shape the current situation of tea ceremony symbol communication, and the traffic rules and algorithm logic of platforms directly affect the presentation form and communication effect of tea ceremony symbols.

Fourth, the current communication of tea ceremony symbols in the new media context faces many prominent problems such as superficialization of symbols, fragmented communication, excessive commercial encroachment, uneven literacy of communicators, stigmatization of symbolic meaning and one-way communication links. These problems are the result of the combined effect of the characteristics of new media itself, the influence of commercial logic and the lack of professional communication subjects, and directly lead to the dissipation of tea ceremony cultural connotations and the alienation of symbolic meaning.

Fifth, the optimization of tea ceremony symbol communication in the new media era needs to start from multiple aspects: constructing a diversified in-depth narrative system to make up for the defects of fragmented communication; empowering immersive experience with new media technologies such as VR/AR to enhance users' participation and experience; cultivating professional communication subjects and standardizing the communication ecology of tea ceremony culture; promoting the international expression of tea ceremony symbols to enhance the international communication power of Chinese tea culture; and adopting positive meaning contestation strategies to realize the purification and meaning rehabilitation of tea ceremony symbols such as "green tea".

In the context of the vigorous development of new media, the inheritance and communication of tea ceremony culture must adhere to the unity of cultural connotation and innovative expression, take the transmission of the spiritual core of the tea ceremony as the fundamental goal, and adapt to the development characteristics of new media platforms to carry out diversified and in-depth communication. At the same time, it is necessary to avoid the excessive commercialization of tea ceremony symbols, build a professional and healthy communication ecology, and make the tea ceremony, as a fine traditional Chinese culture, play a greater role in shaping contemporary people's life concepts and promoting the inheritance and development of traditional culture. This study also has certain limitations, such as the limited selection of new media platform samples and the lack of quantitative analysis of the communication effect of tea ceremony symbols. In the fu-

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ture research, a larger sample range can be selected, and quantitative research methods such as questionnaire survey can be adopted to conduct in-depth research on the communication effect of tea ceremony symbols and the cognitive characteristics of different user groups.

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