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Transcultural Communication Pathways for Belt and Road Stories: An Empathic Perspective

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Abstract:
This study explores the transcultural communication pathways of Belt and Road stories from the perspective of empathic communication, aiming to address current issues in international communication such as the overly official tone of national narratives, weak dialogic foundations in media narratives, and insufficient discourse power in non-governmental narratives. The research highlights that empathic communication, through mechanisms of emotional bonding and value-sharing, can effectively mitigate cultural discount and foster cross-cultural identity. Transcultural communication, grounded in the concept of "a community with a shared future for mankind," advocates for the equal integration of diverse civilizations. Based on a tripartite narrative analysis (national, media, and non-governmental levels), strategies are proposed: constructing a "polyphonic communication" framework to resolve asymmetrical empathy, uncovering shared values to enhance emotional resonance in media narratives, and empowering non-governmental actors to activate collective empathy. These pathways, by leveraging platform dynamics, innovating symbolic expressions, and promoting multi-stakeholder participation, offer practical solutions for the global dissemination of the Belt and Road Initiative. How to tell the story of "The Belt and Road" well in the context of different values and cultural backgrounds, and it is particularly important to update and iterate the concept and way of "telling the story of China well".

Keywords:
Empathic Communication; Belt and Road Stories; Transcultural Communication

In 2013, China proposed the Belt and Road Initiative, creatively endowing the precious historical and cultural achievement of the ancient Silk Road with new contemporary spirit and a fresh interpretation for the new era, demonstrating China's propositions, wisdom and solutions. The Belt and Road Initiative, as a concept, not only reflects China's active integration into the global division of labor system and its leading role in building a community with a shared future for mankind, but also promotes the exchange and mutual learning of diverse civilizations in the context of the "new era of globalization". Transforming the new ideas, new solutions and new wisdom conveyed in this process into narratives in international communication will be an effective way to tell China's story well. How to tell the "Belt and Road" story well in the context of different values and cultural backgrounds, and to update and iterate the concepts and methods of "telling China's story well" is particularly important.

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1 Theoretical Review

1.1 Empathetic Communication

Empathy originated from the German term "Einfühlung" coined by the German aesthete Robert Vischer in 1872, which refers to the projection of one's own emotions onto others or objects and understanding their aesthetic appeal. This concept was later translated into English as "empathy" by psychologist Edward Titchener and has been widely applied in fields such as psychology, philosophy, and aesthetics. Arthur Ciaramicoli defines empathy as "understanding another person's unique experience and responding positively accordingly." It is also defined as "the tendency of an individual to share and understand the emotional states of others during social interaction."

In recent years, some scholars have begun to incorporate empathy into the field of communication studies. Ma Long and Li Hong suggest that empathetic communication refers to the process in which an individual participates in information reception, infection, expression, and sharing when facing the emotional situation of a group, emphasizing new relationship models between individuals and groups, as well as among groups. Liu Haiming and Song Ting define empathetic communication as "the process in which an individual participates in information reception, infection, expression, and sharing when facing the emotional situation of a group." Zhao Jianguo considers empathetic communication as "the process of formation, transmission, and diffusion of common or similar emotions and feelings." Based on the research of these scholars, it can be seen that there is a close connection between empathy and communication. On the one hand, both empathy and communication are based on the process of social interaction and involve the transmission of information and emotions. On the other hand, both empathy and communication can influence others' thoughts and behaviors. Individuals with strong empathy can better establish connections with others, affect their emotions and decisions, and effective communication can persuade others to accept certain viewpoints or take certain actions. Moreover, both empathy and communication rely on feedback for adjustment and improvement. During the process of empathy, individuals need to adjust their understanding and behavior based on others' reactions, and communicators need to evaluate the effectiveness of communication based on the feedback from the recipients and make corresponding adjustments. In addition, both empathy and communication are influenced by culture and context. Different cultural backgrounds and contexts can affect an individual's ability to empathize and the way they communicate.

1.2 Transcultural communication

From the perspective of the formation and development of the global communication system, it can be roughly divided into three stages according to the timeline of the western industrial revolution. The first was the "imperial spread" phase of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, also known as a kind of "British globalization." The second stage is the post-World War II "intercultural communication" stage. There is no doubt that both stages show the tendency of the strong culture to judge and invade the weak culture. The arrival of the "new era of globalization" has brought about the third stage of international communication, the breaking of the Western hegemonic modernization filter and the blessing of "multiple empowerment" in the era of social media, and the process of globalization has undergone new changes and turns.

Welch, a German scholar, proposed the concept of transcultural communication in 1999, believing that the traditional concept of cross-cultural communication was gradually replaced by the recognition and

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promotion of cross-integration between cultures. Chinese scholars Shi Anbin and Sheng Yang pointed out that "cultural transmission" takes a community with a shared future for mankind as its core concept and advocates equal exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations. It is intended to build a communication system of "overall globalization", which can be said to be an extension of the concept of a community of human destiny in the field of news communication. Intercultural communication is different from cross-cultural communication in that it is not the overtaking and inclusion of one culture over another, but the deep interaction and equal communication among cultures to eliminate misunderstandings and strengthen identity between exchanges, so as to achieve the sustainable development of multi-cultures. From the perspective of media development forms, cross-cultural communication relies on one-way communication technologies, including newspapers, radio, television and the early Internet, and emphasizes the political need for ideological control. Moreover, in terms of appealing to emotions, "cross-cultural communication" is not as good as "transcultural communication" in arousing deep emotional resonance of the audience. In the new era of globalization, the comprehensive popularization of network we-media has opened an era in which everyone is a communicator, and the audience who passively receives information has become the main body of information transmission. Therefore, transcultural communication more reflects the connotation of "empowerment" and "empowerment". In the era of "new globalization" led by China under the "Belt and Road" Initiative, the western "cross-cultural" communication theory of "globalizing" has been unable to provide more abundant practical explanations, and the new cognitive vision and practical framework of "transcultural communication" has created a new path for telling the Chinese story well.

2 The theoretical framework of cultural transmission from the perspective of empathy

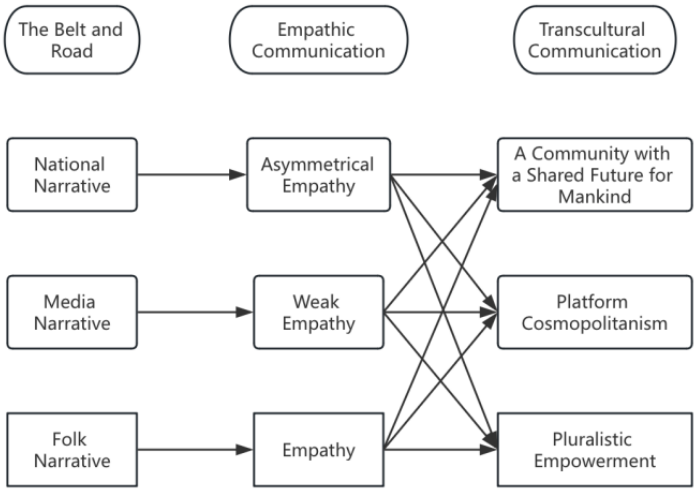


Figure 1.The theoretical framework of cultural transmission from the perspective of empathy

In the era of globalization and the "Belt and Road" initiative, transcultural communication, as a new concept and practice model of cross-cultural communication, is increasingly attracting the attention of academia and industry. As an important psychological mechanism of human emotion connection and

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understanding, empathy plays a unique and crucial role in the process of transcultural transmission. This part aims to construct a theoretical framework of transcultural communication from the perspective of empathy in order to better explain its internal logic and operating mechanism.

2.1 The relationship between different narrative subjects and the communication of empathy

2.1.1 National narrative

At the level of national narrative, asymmetrical empathy is mainly produced. As a macro subject, a country, in the process of disseminating its culture, ideas and policies abroad, will have asymmetry in information and emotional understanding in cultural exchanges with other countries or regions due to the differences in political, economic and cultural strength, as well as the imbalance in communication resources and channels. This kind of asymmetric empathy will affect the direction and effect of transcultural communication. For example, on some international issues, people in different countries may have different degrees of acceptance of relevant transcultural communication contents due to the asymmetric empathy caused by their national narratives.

2.1.2 Media narrative

Media narratives often elicit weak empathy. In the process of communication, due to the influence of commercial interests, ideology and other factors, media may not be able to comprehensively and deeply convey cultural connotations and emotional resonance when reporting and disseminating cross-cultural content, resulting in relatively weak empathic experience for the audience. This kind of weak empathy will restrict the deep transmission and integration of cultural connotations in cultural communication to a certain extent. For example, some international media reports on cultural events in other countries tend to be superficial, and it is difficult for audiences to truly understand and feel the cultural connotations behind them

2.1.2 Folk narrative

Folk narration is easy to produce empathy. The communication and interaction between folk individuals based on daily life and common interests, etc., can better generate strong emotional resonance and mutual understanding from the common points of human nature. This kind of empathy is the most dynamic and vital part of cultural transmission, which can promote the natural integration and innovation of diverse cultures at the folk level. For example, folk art lovers from different countries share each other's works and creative experiences through the Internet, and the empathy formed in this process promotes the cultural transmission of art culture.

2.2 The specific connection and influence of empathic communication and transcultural communication

2.2.1 Community of human Destiny and asymmetric empathy

Starting from the asymmetrical empathy caused by the national narrative, the concept of community of human destiny should be guided in the transcultural communication. Although there is asymmetrical empathy between countries, by emphasizing the common destiny, common challenges and common interests of mankind, this asymmetry can be bridged to a certain extent, so that people in different countries have a

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more inclusive and understanding cognition of each other's culture and development at the macro level, and promote the development of cultural transmission in a direction conducive to the harmonious coexistence of global cultures.

2.2.2 Platform cosmopolitanism and weak empathy

In view of the weak empathy caused by media narration, the introduction of the concept of platform cosmopolitanism can improve this situation. In today's digital era, all kinds of media platforms have become important positions for cultural communication. Through the construction of platform cosmopolitanism, which advocates media platforms to uphold the principles of global vision, diversity and inclusiveness in communication, it breaks the limitations and prejudices of information communication, enhances the richness and depth of cultural content, and thus enhances the audience's empathy experience in cultural communication. Promote the deep integration and innovative communication of culture on the platform.

2.2.3 Pluralistic empowerment and empathy

The empathy produced by folk narration can be further strengthened and expanded through multiple empowerment in the transcultural communication. Multiple empowerment means giving more communication power and resources to private individuals so that they can participate more freely and fully in cross-cultural exchanges, stimulate more cultural creativity and communication vitality through individual empathy, and form a new situation of cultural communication in which multiple subjects participate together and cultural connotations are constantly enriched.

3 The transcultural transmission path of Belt and Road stories from the perspective of empathy

3.1 National narrative: Mobilize the power of the platform to achieve multiple resonance

China's current external communication mode can be summarized as "government-led diversified subject participation mode". On the one hand, international communication practice activities under official leadership can mobilize technology, capital, manpower, material resources and other resources to the greatest extent, but on the other hand, due to its official background, the communication effect is greatly reduced. The communication practice activities that mainly rely on official media and government agencies lead to the unification of the Angle and content of information communication, and the lack of diversified voices and perspectives. In recent years, although China has continuously strengthened its international communication capacity and conveyed the concept of peaceful and friendly exchanges around the main purpose of the Belt and Road Initiative, it has been regarded by some Western countries as an ideological invasion, full of doubts and anxieties about the "rise of China".

Usually, the object will instinctively resonate with the subject's emotions and form the same or similar emotional response. However, when there is a competitive relationship between the subject and the object, or the object thinks that there is a competitive relationship between the two sides, and when the subject and the object belong to different groups, it will give rise to inconsistent emotional reactions with the subject, which is called a kind of "asymmetric empathy". Therefore, based on the long-term binary opposition in the West, the thinking mode of dividing "self" and "other", and the macro narrative with the state as the main body of

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communication is easy to be interpreted as an ideological struggle, and it is difficult to trigger empathy from overseas audiences, resulting in "asymmetric" empathy effect, which leads to distortion and distortion of the meaning of communication.

Bakhtin, a famous Soviet literary scientist, introduced the musical term "polyphony" into the novel theory for the first time, and made further improvement and development. The core of polyphony is dialogue, emphasizing that every individual in the work should be given a full right to speak. It is not only a feature of fiction art, but also a unique cognitive discourse and way of thinking that can be used for reference in the field of communication research. In the context of the Belt and Road Initiative, the innovation of external communication should also follow the same principle and implement the global communication concept of "one world, multiple voices". While telling the story of the "Belt and Road" well, people from all countries are encouraged to participate in the construction of a community of human destiny, and a pluralistic pattern of "polyphonic communication" is formed through "harmony" and "resonance" at different levels. Telling a good Chinese story requires considering looking at yourself from the perspective of others and acknowledging the legitimacy and diversity of different cultural perspectives. By learning from the perspective of externality, we overcome our own limitations and find the problems that are difficult to detect. Take the short video "Song of New China" as an example. The director comes from Turkmenistan and has made field visits during the production process. He has a sense of identity with Chinese history and culture, which can arouse the emotional resonance of overseas audiences. Better spread the story of China's national anthem to the world.

3.2 Media narrative: From changing perceptions to exploring common values

The main body of China's international communication practice is mostly based on the narrative logic of "nation-state". The mainstream media attached to the government and other official organizations are the main carriers of external communication and bear the responsibility of telling Chinese stories well. In recent years, under the guidance of the Belt and Road Initiative, China has carried out various forms of infrastructure construction and economic and trade activities on a global scale, and the political and economic benefits achieved are obvious to all. Mainstream media at all levels actively carry out various forms of external communication, and the construction of the foreign discourse system of the Belt and Road has become an important part of China's international communication capacity building. However, compared with the international first-class media, its international communication ability and influence still need to be improved.

From the perspective of narrative techniques, for a long period of time, China's external communication has always tried to change other people's cognition through persuasive rhetoric, and tends to use communication as a tool to change other people's cognition, rather than two-way dialogue and discussion, which may lead to the reduction of dialogue and understanding between different viewpoints, thus intensifying the distortion and deformation of the meaning of communication content. Therefore, regardless of whether the communication content has a dialogue basis to connect overseas audiences around the world, and whether the audience can inspire emotional identification in the interpretation process, simply focusing on the meaning of the speaker's words will lead to the difficulty of audiences in different cultural backgrounds to have emotional resonance with the communication content, resulting in the dilemma of "words fail to convey the meaning". From the point of view of subject matter selection, over-reliance on classical cultural symbols leads to weak cultural innovation ability. Although classical cultural symbols such as martial arts, Peking Opera, and pandas enjoy global popularity, they often fail to fully represent the rich diversity and complexity of Chinese culture. This

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limitation makes the international audience's cognition of Chinese culture only superficial, and it is difficult to explore the deep culture. In the long term, the constant repetition of these classic symbols can lead to weariness among international audiences and weaken cultural appeal.

There are cultural differences among different nations and countries, but there are often some common values, which can promote communication and understanding between the two sides. Based on this, to tell the "Belt and Road" story well, it is necessary to tap the empathy elements and cultural commonalities in the story, and touch the common points of audiences in different cultural backgrounds through the common theme. In recent years, the attention of foreign media to China's poverty alleviation has gradually increased, in addition to the "Belt and Road" co-construction abroad, some Western countries are also highly concerned about China's poverty alleviation. Although people around the world have different living backgrounds and cultural differences, they have a common yearning for a better life. The hardships, struggles, persistence and dedication of China's poverty alleviation cause transcend national boundaries and ethnic differences, and can arouse the emotional resonance of people around the world. This spirit of struggle and the resonance of poverty alleviation achievements can not only let the world know more about China, but also inspire other countries to think and act on their own poverty alleviation cause. By showing the vivid stories of the characters on the road of poverty alleviation in China, the characters' emotions and inner world are shown from an individual perspective, so that the audience can empathize with them and have emotional resonance. At the same time, highlighting China's efforts and achievements in global issues such as environmental protection, poverty reduction, education and health, presenting China's image as a responsible major country and stimulating the sense of identity of the international community will not only help promote the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, but also help build a more harmonious and inclusive world. Such emotional resonance and identification across cultural differences will help promote understanding and cooperation among countries around the world, promote the smooth implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, and contribute to the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

3.3 Folk narrative: Creating conditions and reasonably empowering

The concept of "cultural discount" was first put forward in 1988. Canadian scholars Hoskins and Millus believe that cultural products in the international market cannot be understood and recognized by audiences in other regions due to differences in cultural backgrounds, which ultimately leads to the weakening of cultural value. In the process of telling the "Belt and Road" story well, there is inevitably a phenomenon of localization. Overseas audiences from different countries grow up in different cultural fields, have different cultural backgrounds and cultural needs, and will habitually examine and interpret stories from their own cultural perspectives. In this process, it is inevitable that there will be misunderstanding and antagonistic interpretation of foreign cultures, resulting in cultural discount.

In the wake of the COVID-19 epidemic, China has increased the number of ports applicable to the 144-hour visa-free transit policy, attracting a large number of foreign tourists to China. From January to July 2024, 17.254 million foreigners entered China at various ports, an increase of 129.9% year-on-year, and cross-border tourism across the country ushered in a peak. Videos with the topic of "China Travel" have been popular on overseas social media, and foreign friends have been recruited to participate in the team of China travel, which has also become the "traffic password" of overseas bloggers. On the one hand, overseas bloggers' personal views of China do not carry any propaganda color, but are more intimate and immersive.

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Following their shots, the audience can better feel and recognize a brand new and vibrant China. On the other hand, the short videos of "China Travel" produced by overseas bloggers mostly start from daily life, and the themes are mostly about the clothing, food, housing and transportation of local people, especially the display of Chinese food. Food is the priority of the people, and it can also arouse the empathy of the audience. Growing up in the same social and cultural background, the same way of thinking and language habits make the content narrated and presented by overseas bloggers more culturally and emotionally acceptable to the local audience. This folk narrative, which is opposed to the official narrative, can to a great extent reduce the problem of information misunderstanding or lower acceptance caused by cultural differences. The binary opposition in the process of cultural transmission is weakened, and people from different countries, different races and deep places can empathize with others in different cultures, triggering the effect of "empathy and empathy", thus continuously expanding the space and depth of storytelling.

With the promotion of the "Belt and Road" Initiative, through the elaboration of the "Belt and Road" story, the cooperation concept, cultural exchanges, common development and other themes in the "Belt and Road" initiative will be spread to all parts of the world, so that more people can understand and participate in the process of global cooperation. Encourage civil societies, social organizations and volunteer groups in countries along the Belt and Road to actively participate in the dissemination of "Belt and Road" stories, and explore multi-voice, multi-dimensional and multi-form narrative methods to make up for the discourse gap in international communication. Reasonable empowerment can provide them with certain communication resources, such as publicity materials, access rights to communication channels, etc., so that they can combine their advantages of being close to people's lives to tell the "Belt and Road" stories around them, such as touching stories in folk trade exchanges and interesting cultural exchanges at the community level. A collection and reward mechanism for Belt and Road stories will be established to commend and reward non-governmental organizations or individuals who collect and disseminate influential stories, so as to stimulate the enthusiasm and creativity of non-governmental communication.

4 Conclusion

In the context of the "new globalization era" and the deepening of the "Belt and Road Initiative", the combination of empathic communication and transcultural communication provides a new theoretical perspective and practical path for telling China's story well and promoting mutual learning among civilizations. Starting from the three dimensions of national narrative, media narrative and folk narrative, this paper systematically discusses the predicament and breakthrough direction of the "Belt and Road" story-to-culture communication, and reveals the difference of the role of empathy mechanism in different communication subjects and its far-reaching impact on cultural identity.

First of all, the national narrative needs to break through the shackles of "asymmetric empathy" and transform the "Chinese solo" into a "global chorus" of countries along the line by constructing a pattern of "polyphony communication". For example, the short video "Song of New China" reconstructs the Chinese story from the perspective of others, successfully bridging the cultural cognition gap and demonstrating the communication potential of multiple resonance. Secondly, media narrative should shift from "persuasive communication" to "common value mining", and activate the emotional resonance of cross-cultural audiences through data narrative, micro-cases and the association of global issues. The global dissemination practice

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of China's poverty alleviation story shows that the emphasis on common human values such as "poverty eradication", "fairness and justice" can effectively weaken ideological bias and promote the sharing of cultural significance. Finally, the "empathy" effect of folk narration injects fresh vitality into the transcultural communication. Through empowering overseas bloggers, cross-border tourists and other folk subjects, the daily life narrative dispelling cultural discounts, with the help of digital technology to achieve the creative transformation of cultural symbols, and finally form a "bottom-up" cultural integration momentum.

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