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International Communication Strategies for the Inheritance and Development of Xuzhou Han Culture

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Abstract: Xuzhou is an important birthplace and core carrier of Han culture, the culture of the Western and Eastern Han dynasties (206 BCE–220 CE). Against the background of building a culturally strong nation and strengthening the capacity for international communication, promoting the international communication of Xuzhou Han culture is both an intrinsic requirement for sustaining the historical lineage of Chinese civilization and a practical choice for serving mutual learning among civilizations. Drawing on existing scholarship on Han culture and proceeding from the theoretical perspectives of cultural identity and cultural identification, this paper systematically reviews the resource endowment and heritage value of Xuzhou Han culture and analyzes the practical dilemmas confronting its international communication in five respects: fragmented and symbol-laden content provision, undiversified communication actors, outdated and insufficiently digitized channels, obstacles to audience identification, and the fragile foundation of inheritance. It then tapps into historical and contemporary lessons, including the overseas transmission of Han culture within the East Asian cultural sphere, the localized reception of foreign cultures in China, and the international communication of Chinese martial arts and hanfu, and proposes strategic pathways in six dimensions: content, actors, channels, industry, identification, and institutional and talent support. The paper aims to provide theoretical support and practical reference for the international communication of local fine traditional culture.

Keywords: Xuzhou Han culture; cultural inheritance; international communication; communication strategy

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1. Introduction

Culture is the soul of a country and a nation. The fine traditional culture of China constitutes the deepest cultural soft power of the Chinese nation and the enduring source of its vitality. In the new era, the Party and the state have repeatedly stressed the need to enhance cultural confidence, strengthen the capacity for

international communication, carefully construct a foreign discourse system, and tell China's stories well and convey China's voice to the world. Within this strategic framework, regional culture, as an organic component of the national cultural ecosystem, carries a dual mission: to be inherited and sustained at home and to be presented and understood abroad. How to promote the creative transformation and innovative development of outstanding regional cultures so that they can reach out to the world while being inherited has therefore become a question of the times confronting cultural governance actors at all levels. As international audiences grow increasingly curious about China, the way in which local cultural traditions are narrated and presented has a direct bearing on the image of the country as a whole; the international communication of regional culture is thus no longer an optional supplement to, but an integral part of, the national strategy of cultural openness.

Located at the junction of the four provinces of Jiangsu, Shandong, Henan, and Anhui, Xuzhou is the birthplace and core area of the culture of the two Han dynasties. Since Liu Bang rose from Feng and Pei to found the great Han dynasty, Xuzhou served as the political and cultural center of the Chu Kingdom during the Han period and left behind a magnificent array of cultural remains, including Han tombs, Han pictorial stone reliefs, and Han terracotta warriors, giving rise to the saying that "to appreciate the culture of the Han dynasties, one must come to Xuzhou." The Han dynasty was the first long-lived unified empire in Chinese history, and the cultural achievements it bequeathed—in institutions, thought, art, and daily life—exerted a lasting influence on the subsequent development of Chinese civilization. As the most recognizable regional cultural emblem of Xuzhou, Chu–Han culture not only condenses the historical memory of the formation of a unified multi-ethnic Chinese civilization but also carries the cultural identification of the people of Xuzhou. However, compared with such abundant heritage, the international communication of Xuzhou Han culture remains markedly inadequate. The presentation of cultural resources is still largely confined to static display and sightseeing experience; content interpretation and discourse conversion oriented toward international audiences remain relatively weak; and the questions of how regional culture can rise from a "local narrative" to an "international expression" and evolve from "self-presentation" to "reception by others" still await systematic research. This paper focuses precisely on the international communication of Xuzhou Han culture. On the basis of reviewing its resource endowment and analyzing its practical dilemmas, and employing historical experience and exemplary cases from abroad, it proposes strategic pathways of targeted relevance, in the hope of contributing both scholarly insight and practical reference to the international communication of local fine traditional culture. In this sense, the present study treats international communication not as a matter of publicity alone but as a systematic question of cultural translation and cultural governance.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Foundations

Existing research on the inheritance and communication of Han culture can be examined at three levels, which together outline the intellectual background against which this study is situated. First, with regard to the connotation and value of Han culture, Sun Shaohua takes the rediscovery of Qu Yuan and the Songs of Chu in the Western Han dynasty as an opportunity to examine the historical process through which a "cultural identity" was confirmed and "cultural identification" was formed, revealing that Han culture was not the self-enclosed culture of any single ethnic group but a composite form generated through the fusion of multiple sources, and that it is characterized by openness and inclusiveness[1]. Wang Chunyang's review of the

inaugural Nandu Forum on Han Culture Studies brings together the latest achievements in the study of Han-dynasty thought and culture and of Han pictorial stone reliefs, reflecting the tendency of Han culture research to move toward an integrated, holistic cultural approach[2]. Second, with regard to the overseas transmission of Han culture, Wang Sihao examines the reception and reinterpretation of Fang Bao's scholarship in Korea within the broad horizon of East Asian Han culture and proposes that the circulation and resonance of Han culture in East Asia be understood from a "within-the-world" perspective, thereby demonstrating that Han culture has enjoyed a long historical tradition of transnational communication[3]. Third, Wei Pengju interprets the "hanfu fever" from the perspective of cultural economics and advocates developing a cultural industry with Chinese characteristics on the basis of ontological cultural self-awareness[4]. In addition, Chen Yong's study of the types, values, and development pathways of Jiangsu's regionally distinctive archival culture[4], Tong Yanfeng's inquiry into the transmission of tacit information in ethnic documentary heritage[5], and Zhou Weifeng's research on the cultural exchange and intellectual fusion embodied in the literature of the two Han dynasties[6] provides support from the dimensions of resource development, inheritance and protection, and textual interpretation, respectively.

Taken as a whole, systematic research that takes "the international communication of Xuzhou Han culture" as its direct object and runs through the complete chain of "resources–dilemmas–strategies" remains scarce; most existing studies address either the cultural value of Han heritage or individual cases of international communication, without connecting resource endowment, practical obstacles, and strategic design into one analytical whole. The present paper attempts to fill this gap. Building on the achievements reviewed above, it employs the theory of cultural identity and cultural identification and the theory of cross-cultural communication as its analytical tools. The former provides a lens for understanding why Han culture matters as a source of shared identification and what is at stake when such culture is transmitted across borders, while the latter draws attention to the processes of encoding, channel transmission, and audience decoding that determine whether cultural meaning survives the journey from one cultural context to another. Together, the two theories organize the paper's inquiry into the chain of "resources–dilemmas–strategies" and establish an analytical framework for the international communication of Xuzhou Han culture. In this framework, international communication is understood as a process in which cultural resources are first made meaningful to the home community and are then translated, transmitted, and re-signified for audiences abroad; the two theories respectively illuminate the two ends of this process—the domestic construction of cultural meaning and its cross-border journey.

3. Resource Endowment and Heritage Value of Xuzhou Han Culture

From the perspective of history and culture, Xuzhou is the central region of Chu–Han culture. Among the regionally distinctive cultures of Jiangsu, Chu–Han culture is centered on Xuzhou[4]. As such, Xuzhou bears the key memories of the formative process of the unified pattern of Chinese civilization, and its cultural resources inherently possess the potential to narrate the cultural story of "pluralistic unity and inclusiveness"[1]. This historical position endows Xuzhou Han culture with a significance that reaches far beyond the locality: it is not merely a regional tradition but a living witness to how Chinese civilization took shape through the convergence of diverse regional cultures.

From the perspective of material remains, Han tombs, Han pictorial stone reliefs, and Han terracotta

warriors are jointly known as the "Three Wonders of the Han Dynasty." More than two thousand Han pictorial stone reliefs have been discovered in Xuzhou to date, with subject matter ranging from myths and legends and historical allusions to scenes of social life. Together, they constitute a panoramic "encyclopedia" of Han-dynasty society written in images[4]. Owing to their intuitive pictorial narrative, Han pictorial stone reliefs provide a unique medium through which international audiences can enter the spiritual world of Han-dynasty China; their visual language possesses a strong cross-cultural readability, a value that was fully highlighted at the inaugural Nandu Forum on Han Culture Studies[2]. Meanwhile, the jade and bronze artifacts and the Han terracotta warriors unearthed from Han tombs, together with the pictorial stone reliefs, represent the summit of Han-dynasty material culture and provide a rich and diverse set of vehicles for international communication.

From the perspective of literature and language, Xuzhou falls within the Zhongyuan Mandarin dialect area, and its dialect culture constitutes a living component of Chu–Han culture[4]. Moreover, the literature of the two Han dynasties exhibits a sustained tendency of exchange and fusion among regional cultures[6], which suggests that the communication of Han culture is by no means the mere display of static remains but rather the continuation of a living cultural lineage. Indeed, the dialects, folk customs, and oral traditions that survive in the Xuzhou region today can be read as the continuation of the very cultural patterns represented in the ancient remains. In sum, Xuzhou Han culture possesses multiple heritage values in terms of cultural identification, academic research, mutual learning among civilizations, and industrial development, thereby providing a solid resource foundation for international communication.

4. Practical Dilemmas in the International Communication of Xuzhou Han Culture

First, content provision is fragmented and symbol-laden. Current external presentations tend to emphasize form over substance and lack in-depth interpretation of the spiritual values of Han culture. The simple accumulation of cultural symbols fails to produce a coherent narrative, and international audiences, lacking the shared cultural background of domestic audiences, find it difficult to overcome the barrier of cultural discount[7]. Second, communication actors are undiversified. Communication relies mainly on the one-way output of government departments and cultural heritage institutions, while universities, research institutes, cultural enterprises, and non-governmental forces participate insufficiently; a communication pattern characterized by government leadership, multi-actor coordination, and complementary advantages has yet to take shape. Third, communication channels are outdated and insufficiently digitized. Communication relies mostly on traditional media and offline activities, whereas emerging channels such as short videos, social media, and virtual reality remain underutilized, and digital initiatives such as metaverse virtual exhibition halls are still at an early exploratory stage[4]. Compared with such traditional cultural categories as martial arts and hanfu, which already possess mature digital communication practices, Xuzhou Han culture still lags markedly behind in the digitization of content production and the internationalization of communication operations. The gap is particularly striking given that digital platforms now constitute the primary gateway through which overseas audiences encounter foreign cultures. Fourth, obstacles to audience identification persist. The historical contexts and symbolic systems carried by Han culture pose comprehension barriers to international audiences. Deep-seated notions such as the spirit of rites and music and the unity of heaven and humanity, being "tacit information" that depends on specific cultural psychology, are the most liable to

be lost in cross-cultural transmission; if mishandled, they can easily be attenuated or even distorted[5]. What is self-evident to a domestic audience must be made explicit and re-encoded for viewers abroad, and this labor of translation has not yet been systematically undertaken. Fifth, the foundation of inheritance is fragile. International communication presupposes high-quality local inheritance. If fundamental problems such as the shortage of cultural inheritors and the inadequate participation of the younger generation are not resolved, international communication will become water without a source[5].

5. Historical Lessons: Experiences of the Overseas Transmission and Inheritance of Han Culture

First, the overseas transmission of Han culture has relied on shared canonical texts and academic lineages. The sustained response that Fang Bao's scholarship received in Korea was possible precisely because the Confucian classics, prose traditions, and literati spirit shared within the East Asian sphere of Han culture constituted a "common language" for cross-cultural dialogue[3]. This suggests that deep-level dialogue among civilizations should be achieved through the translation of classics, academic exchange, and the construction of shared discourse, rather than the mere transportation of surface-level symbols; academic classics are the most stable vehicles of cross-cultural dialogue, and their value possesses a universality that transcends time and space; in this sense, the deeper and more durable a culture's textual foundations, the more easily its core values can travel. Second, cultural preservation cannot be separated from creative "recontextualization." Zhao Mengfu's Thousand-Character Classic in Six Scripts preserved endangered calligraphic scripts amid the cultural collisions of a multi-ethnic era, thereby securing the continuation of Han culture[8]. This demonstrates that inheritance does not mean preserving culture in its original form but rather a creative transformation that bestows new life upon old forms in new historical contexts. Third, cultural reception operates through a mechanism of "localization." The Sogdians who entered China gradually accepted the social institutions, artistic culture, and religious thought of the Han people and projected these onto their own funerary art, thereby completing the sinicization of their cultural expression[9]. This suggests that the international communication of Han culture should respect the cultural contexts of recipient countries and promote the "re-localization" of cultural symbols in foreign soil, rather than pursuing an "export in original form." Fourth, the literature of the two Han dynasties served as a natural vehicle of cultural transmission by virtue of its emotional commonality[6]; the translation of literary and artistic works can transcend institutional and linguistic barriers and speak directly to the human heart, which is why literature and art remain among the most effective channels of cultural exchange. Fifth, the contemporary practices of martial arts and hanfu demonstrate that the international communication of traditional culture is moving toward a compound model of "culture + communication + industry," in which content, channels, industry, and talent are all indispensable[7]. What these cases share is the lesson that no single channel, however effective, can sustain long-term communication; only the convergence of multiple resources can. These experiences, drawn from both history and the present day, provide a rich source of reference for the strategic design of the international communication of Xuzhou Han culture.

6. Strategic Paths for the International Communication of Xuzhou Han Culture

In light of the resource endowment, the practical dilemmas, and the historical lessons discussed above, this

section proposes strategic pathways for the international communication of Xuzhou Han culture from six interrelated dimensions.

6.1. Content Strategy: Refining Core Cultural Symbols and Constructing a Translatable Discourse System

Using the iconic remains of Han pictorial stone reliefs, Han tombs, and Han terracotta warriors as visual anchors, the "Han culture in Xuzhou" brand should be built upon the maxim that "to appreciate the culture of the Han dynasties, one must come to Xuzhou." Narrative themes of world significance should be distilled from this heritage, such as the ideal of grand unity, the spirit of rites and music, and ceaseless self-improvement, so that international audiences can grasp the spiritual core of Han culture rather than merely its surface symbols. The contemporary translation of pictorial narratives and historical allusions should be advanced so as to effect a shift from "cultural monologue" to "cultural dialogue," while guarding against the piling up of formalistic symbols and the sacrifice of cultural authenticity[7]. Multilingual and multi-media products of cultural interpretation should be developed, and storytelling-based expression should be employed to enhance the emotional resonance of international audiences. Only when international audiences can follow the internal logic of Han culture—how its symbols relate to its values—can communication move from impression to understanding.

6.2. Actor Strategy: Building a Multi-Actor Communication Community

Government departments should make overall plans and provide policy support, incorporating the international communication of Han culture into the overall framework of foreign cultural exchange. Universities should leverage their foreign-language disciplines and research strengths in Han culture to carry out academic translation and talent cultivation and to play the role of think tanks. Cultural enterprises should advance product development and international marketing. Non-governmental organizations, overseas Chinese, and international students should act as "folk envoys" of cultural exchange. In this way, an overall synergy can be formed in which the government provides guidance, academia provides support, enterprises act as the mainstay, and the public participates. Through such multi-actor coordination, the bottleneck of the insufficient communication capacity of any single actor can be effectively overcome.

6.3. Channel Strategy: Digital Empowerment and a Three-Dimensional All-Media Matrix

Traditional channels such as Confucius Institutes, sister cities, and international exhibitions should be consolidated, while emerging channels such as short videos, social media, and virtual reality should be fully utilized. Drawing on the experience of the metaverse virtual exhibition hall of the Xuzhou Municipal Archives[4], a global digital resource database and a cloud-based exhibition hall of Xuzhou Han culture should be constructed, enabling overseas audiences to "enter" Xuzhou Han culture beyond the constraints of time and space. The aim is not to replicate offline display online, but to create forms of encounter that only digital media can provide. Differentiated communication should be implemented for different platforms and audience groups, and a mechanism for monitoring and feedback on communication effects should be established so that strategies can be adjusted on the basis of evidence.

6.4. Industry Strategy: Integrating Culture and Industry and Developing Foreign Cultural Trade

Characteristic industries such as hanfu, Han embroidery, cultural and creative products, and digital cultural products should be cultivated, drawing on the industrial experience of the internationalization of the Japanese kimono and the Korean hanbok[7]. Relying on the integration of culture and tourism, international tourism and study-tour products with Han culture themes should be developed. The export of Han culture products should be promoted through cross-border e-commerce and international exhibitions, so that the prosperity of the industry in turn drives the transmission of the culture and sustains its international communication with economic vitality.

6.5. Identification Strategy: From Cultural Export to Mutual Learning among Civilizations

While respecting cultural differences, the points of value convergence between Chinese culture and the cultures of recipient countries should be identified, for shared values are the psychological foundation of cross-cultural identification. Cross-cultural identification should be promoted with a dialogic attitude of "appreciating the beauty of other cultures as well as one's own, and seeking shared beauty in harmony"[1]. Overseas scholars, media, and the public should be invited to participate in the research, experience, and re-creation of Han culture, so that Xuzhou Han culture becomes an open text through which the international community jointly tells China's story, enhancing understanding and consolidating consensus through mutual learning. Communication of this kind proceeds less by convincing than by conversing, and its success is measured not by the number of messages sent but by the depth of understanding achieved.

6.6. Support Strategy: Strengthening Talent Support and Institutional Safeguards

Relying on universities in Xuzhou, interdisciplinary talents who understand Han culture, are proficient in foreign languages, and are familiar with the laws of international communication should be cultivated, with priority given to tackling specialized translation challenges such as the inscriptions on Han pictorial stone reliefs and the classics of the two Han dynasties. The policy system for the protection, development, and external communication of cultural resources should be improved, and support mechanisms for cultural trade and foreign exchange and cooperation should be perfected. Great importance should be attached to the building of a team of cultural inheritors, so as to consolidate the foundation of Han culture inheritance[5]. With talent and institutions as twin drivers, lasting support can be provided for international communication.

7. Conclusion

Xuzhou Han culture is an important component of China's fine traditional culture and the most distinctive cultural calling card of Xuzhou. Promoting its inheritance, development, and international communication is both an intrinsic requirement for enhancing cultural confidence and sustaining the historical lineage of Chinese civilization and an inherent obligation to serve the strategy of building a culturally strong nation and to promote mutual learning among civilizations. Proceeding from resource endowment, practical dilemmas, and historical experience, this paper has analyzed the conditions and obstacles of the international communication of Xuzhou Han culture and proposed strategic pathways in six dimensions: content, actors, channels, industry, identification, and institutional and talent support. These strategies are mutually

supportive and should be implemented as a whole rather than in isolation. Only by adhering to the principle of inheritance as the root and communication as the function, nurturing communication confidence with cultural self-awareness, and promoting mutual learning among civilizations with openness and inclusiveness, can Xuzhou Han culture manifest its unique value in the world cultural landscape and contribute its cultural strength to the building of a community with a shared future for mankind. Future research may further examine the effects of specific communication campaigns, the reception of Han culture among particular international audiences, and the comparative performance of different channels, so as to refine the strategies proposed here with empirical evidence.

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