

Innovative Audiovisual Communication in Art and Culture Documentary Films within the Context of Cultural Confidence: A Case Study of "Art in China"

Luo Sen*

Sichuan University of Media and Communications, Xueyuan Street, Chengdu, China

**Corresponding author: 642346390@qq.com*

Keywords: Cultural confidence, Documentary, Audiovisual communication, Art in China

Abstract: As China's national strength continues to grow, its cultural image has garnered increasing attention. Shaping China's cultural image, fostering cultural confidence, and narrating compelling Chinese stories are pressing tasks today. While traditional art and culture documentaries have laid a solid foundation for the dissemination of Chinese culture, the challenge has always been how to achieve visual innovation. "Art in China" explores narrative styles, audio-visual language, and technology, achieving more effective communication. This paper argues that "Art in China," leveraging cutting-edge digital technology to enhance artistic expression, offers viewers an immersive aesthetic experience. It has advanced innovation in audio-visual communication within art and culture documentaries, showcasing the beauty of Chinese cultural artistry to the world.

1. Introduction

"Chinese civilization, enduring for thousands of years and resilient through numerous challenges, stands as a marvel of human civilization and a source of our cultural confidence. Integrating cultural confidence into the national spirit and cultural character of the entire nation is essential, fostering an uplifting demeanor and a rational and tranquil mindset." In recent years, a continuous stream of documentaries produced by the China Central Television (CCTV) has been presented to audiences, dedicated to promoting traditional Chinese culture. Cultural confidence is being embedded in the creative expressions of these documentaries. "Art in China," a documentary series launched by CCTV in March 2022, focuses on classic artworks from major art museums in China. It has already aired three seasons, with each episode lasting only 12 minutes. Although concise in form, this format aligns perfectly with the fast-paced nature of contemporary video consumption. However, the content fully conveys the historical context, artistic temperament, exquisite craftsmanship, and enduring significance of renowned artists. Leveraging cutting-edge three-dimensional digital technology, traditional artworks come to life, transcending their inherent serenity to vividly capture cultural symbols, contemporary values, and the spirit of the times. This showcases the aesthetic beauty of traditional Chinese culture to the world, bearing witness to the historical journey of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The documentary "Art in China" has received unanimous acclaim from a diverse audience due to its captivating storytelling and extraordinary presentation.

This paper focuses on this documentary, analyzing its narrative style and exploring the expressive power of audiovisual language, as well as the transformative potential of three-dimensional digital technology in traditional painting. We hope that more outstanding works of this kind will be produced to enrich the cultural knowledge of viewers, enhance their aesthetic sensibilities, and strengthen the cultural confidence of the people.

2. Innovation in Narrative Mode

Documentaries related to historical subjects often face challenges in collecting historical visual materials, which can pose difficulties in storytelling. "Art in China" explores the innovation in narrative mode to accurately recreate historical environments and the psychological processes of artists during their creative endeavors. In "Art in China," the narrative doesn't solely focus on artists and their classic artworks. Instead, it magnifies certain characteristics of artists and their artworks to bring out the historical context in which these creations originated. It traces the temporal context of great works, placing artists within the flow of history. This approach allows audiences to better understand that period, appreciate the artists' comprehension of traditional Chinese ink techniques, and the reasons behind the elevation of their artistic skills. This narrative technique elevates the documentary beyond a simple textual dimension to encompass a temporal and socio-historical dimension, offering viewers a more comprehensive and profound experience.

The essence of a documentary lies in presenting real records, and it is the soul of documentary filmmaking. To construct the narrative's real-time dimension, the production team of "Art in China" employs methods such as visiting the homes of artists, interviewing their friends and family, consulting art critics, and using textual materials from existing classic works. For instance, in the first episode of the documentary series, the life story, strong character, and the background in which the artworks were created by Qi Baishi, a renowned painter, are portrayed. While the name "Qi Baishi" may be widely recognized, few have taken the time to truly appreciate his masterpieces. Even fewer know the backgrounds of these artworks. However, through "Art in China," viewers can immerse themselves in Qi Baishi's artwork and experience the depth and significance of his creative process. For example, Qi Baishi's paintings of shrimp are incredibly lifelike. This isn't just due to his exceptional artistic skill but also his keen observation of life, which indicates that Qi Baishi was an individual who passionately embraced life and had a deep affection for it. Such a personality easily piques the audience's curiosity and admiration for the environment in which Qi Baishi lived. Therefore, the production team decided to provide viewers with answers by visiting Qi Baishi's hometown, Xianzu in Hunan province. Qi Baishi was born in an ordinary rural family in Xingziwu, Hunan, in 1864. His rustic lifestyle and extensive travels led him to embrace the essence of learning from nature. He depicted the vibrant life in the fields, portraying cicadas, spiders, bees, bamboo rakes, and baskets, setting him apart from traditional literati painters who focused on appreciating flowers and arranging branches. His simplicity and innocence infused his work with a unique charm. By depicting such characteristics, the documentary provides insight into the environment in which Qi Baishi lived, allowing viewers to imagine what his life might have been like.

To faithfully recreate historical backgrounds and the psychological journeys of artists during their creative processes, "Art in China" employs various methods such as images, archival footage, news documentary materials, dramatic reenactments, and scene recreations (Figure 1). This storytelling approach enhances the depth of the narrative. Since the documentary genre dedicated to art and culture lacks the ability to convey its richness and depth through a singular textual display, innovative techniques are necessary. The production team uses old photographs and visual materials to showcase the life stories of artists, expanding both artistic knowledge and the underlying human spirit. By adopting these techniques, the documentary not only offers a more three-dimensional and

comprehensive viewing experience but also conveys a sense of authority and professionalism. Drama reenactments and scene recreations are increasingly favored by documentary filmmakers as they provide a unique perspective. In some documentaries, when there's a lack of visual materials to represent the subject accurately, actors may be employed to recreate historical realities or even fictionalize certain aspects. Authenticity is the inherent quality of documentaries and varies depending on the subject matter ^[1]. In the case of "Art in China," various reenactment techniques were used to recreate the artistic processes of the featured artists since it was impossible to precisely reproduce their creative activities. This approach enriches the audience's viewing experience.



Figure 1: Qi Baishi 3D Scene

3. Innovation in Audiovisual Language Expression

Traditional Chinese painting is deeply rooted in Chinese culture, using materials like brushes, rice paper, and ink to create a unique perspective theory. It's not only an integral part of Chinese culture but also a significant component of world culture. Traditional Chinese painting places a strong emphasis on artistic conception. The creation of Chinese traditional painting starts with a well-conceived idea. Many art theorists stress this point, whether it's painting landscapes, figures, or flora and fauna. Zhang Yanyuan from the Tang Dynasty emphasized the importance of intention in his discourse on the "Six Principles": "To depict an object, its form must be similar, and its form must fully capture its essence. The essence and form are both derived from the main idea and guided by the use of the brush." He believed that intention is paramount, and with profound intention, a painting can achieve a rich diversity of forms and convey a sense of wonder.

Furthermore, traditional Chinese painting focuses on using lines to create forms and adheres to the principle of "expressing the spirit through form." "Expressing the spirit through form" is a famous saying from Gu Kaizhi, an artist from the Jin Dynasty, which established the aesthetic view that in Chinese art, the spirit is superior to form. This differs significantly from the abstract aesthetics of modern European art, which primarily values form over spirit. In traditional Chinese painting, the goal is not just to mimic forms but to elevate them to the level of spirit. Artists aim to depict the spiritual essence of their subjects, transcending mere physical likeness. "Art in China" not only showcases various artworks but also incorporates the aesthetic characteristics and values of traditional Chinese painting. This integration gives the documentary an extraordinary aesthetic quality and style. Lastly, traditional Chinese painting places importance on multiple perspectives, the "black-as-white" composition principle, and the use of both focused and scattered perspective techniques. This allows for the artistic representation of objects based on the artistic needs of the composition. Objects can be elongated or compressed, and their positions altered as needed.

In terms of visual and auditory language expression, "Art in China" utilizes a rich array of techniques. It makes full use of elements like imagery, sound, lighting, colour, and various forms of visual performance to create a multidimensional and immersive viewing experience ^[2]. Dramatic performances are set against the interplay of light and shadow, which enhances the impact of character portrayals. To provide viewers with a close look at the masterful brushwork, the documentary extensively employs close-up shots, effectively displaying every brushstroke in the creation process. Faithful colour reproduction enhances the visual appeal of the paintings, making the serene artworks shine brilliantly. The use of visual language combines with the essence of traditional Chinese painting to create a poetic ambiance, allowing even non-expert viewers to immerse themselves in the experience and feel deeply engaged.

"Art in China" not only leverages visual elements but also maximizes auditory aspects, providing the audience with a high-quality audio-visual feast. Traditional Chinese painting emphasizes conveying artistic conception, requiring active engagement from viewers who must consider and immerse themselves in the artwork. In contrast, a documentary like "Art in China" transmits visual and auditory elements through media, creating a more passive experience for the audience. They only need to open their visual and auditory senses to access a wealth of information. The documentary showcases the beauty of traditional Chinese painting in a multi-dimensional and comprehensive manner. Creators of art and culture documentaries must carefully select visual elements that evoke strong emotions, and they must also pay attention to auditory elements. For instance, in the first episode of "Art in China," the depiction of Qi Baishi's shrimp is rendered with just a few brushstrokes, yet they vividly come to life on the screen. The addition of sound effects for the movements of shrimp and crabs, as well as the sound of flowing water, enhances the realism of the paintings. The usage of these sound effects effectively enriches the viewing experience. Furthermore, classical background music is used to introduce rhythm and tonal variations, which convey the essence, soul, and emotional depth of the artworks featured in "Art in China." This aesthetics are highly penetrating and resonate deeply within the audience.

In the auditory dimension, "Art in China" provides a wonderful experience that reaches deep into the audience's hearts. When delving further into auditory aspects, it's essential to consider elements such as music, sound effects, and voiceovers. Voiceovers are based on the composition of the script. Although "Art in China" focuses on classic Chinese art, with a broad thematic scope, the script takes a micro-level approach. For example, it delves into the personal life of Qi Baishi, emphasizing the portrayal of character through nuanced details of daily life. The script aims for simplicity, avoids flowery language or didactic tones, and maintains a down-to-earth quality. The documentary employs a literary "white description" style in its script, characterized by its concise and straightforward nature. Sentences are short and impactful, carrying warmth and human touch. For instance, Qi Baishi's paintings are described as "plain-spoken prose" in the context of the documentary, devoid of ornate language, avoiding populism, free from melodrama, and resisting imitation of predecessors. It's like a breath of fresh air in Chinese art, unintentionally opening a window to alleviate the stuffiness of language. This simple and innocent approach creates a sense of immersion, allowing even those without an art background to connect with and appreciate the content on an emotional level, evoking a sense of resonance.

4. Empowering Traditional Painting Craftsmanship with 3D Digital Technology

Art and culture documentaries often focus on static textual representations of artworks. Traditional filming methods, while suitable for providing overall introductions and detailed depictions of artworks, fall short in vividly portraying the creative process and bringing the elements within the paintings to life. With the continuous advancement of digital technology, it has

become revolutionary for art and culture documentaries in the context of new media dissemination. The documentary "Art in China" leverages cutting-edge television production technology of the digital age to break the technological barriers in the creation of traditional art and culture documentaries. It introduces a paradigm shift in digital aesthetics and aesthetic experiences. According to Liu Fan, the producer and chief director of "Art in China," the core concept of the film, "3D technology revitalizing the classics," was established from the outset. It harnesses 3D modelling technology to "breathe life" into 2D artworks, striving to lower the threshold of art appreciation and create a visualized, digital art gallery [3]. The real world is three-dimensional, while paintings on paper are two-dimensional (Figure 2). Traditional masters of painting first depict the three-dimensional qualities of the real world on rice paper and then use their exceptional skills to create a sense of three-dimensional space in two-dimensional artworks. This process involves the representation of three dimensions in a two-dimensional space, and it is a creative process that abstracts before concretely depicting, like the psychological aesthetic experience of viewers when appreciating artworks. The "Art in China" creative team utilized 3D modelling technology to "animate" 2D artworks with the viewer's sensory perception in mind. This immersive approach results in a digital immersive aesthetic effect, making classic artworks come alive, and viewers feel as if they are present within them.



Figure 2: 3D Gallery

By adopting a model of "technological deconstruction + holographic interaction + immersive experience" and utilizing new technologies such as 3D modelling, animation effects, 4K ultra-high-definition photography, macro photography, aerial photography, time-lapse photography, XR, and more, the film expands the avenues for expressing artworks in image, digital, and three-dimensional forms [4]. It enriches visual presentation and soundscapes, vividly "revitalizing" flat artworks, innovating aesthetic expression, and fully reproducing the intellectual, artistic, and creative aspects of artistic classics. The film's goal is to create a dynamic, digital "art gallery." In terms of technical implementation, the production team used 4K ultra-high-definition photography and macro photography techniques to capture artworks in stunning detail. They then employed 3D modelling technology to create lifelike dynamic effects. However, not all brushstrokes could be modelled effectively. Since Chinese painting emphasizes artistic conception, some brushwork consists of delicate outlines with indistinct ink boundaries, making it challenging for 3D modelling. Therefore, the documentary production team undertook a secondary creative process without altering the original composition and artistic conception. Each frame had to be meticulously refined, ensuring that the texture and characteristics of the artwork were vividly conveyed. This resulted in a clear

and distinct representation of details, offering an aesthetic experience that is both engaging and tangible, achieving a natural and realistic effect ^[5].

5. Conclusions

The Chinese nation possesses a rich cultural heritage, and our traditional painting techniques and classic artworks are integral components of our profound culture. We must maintain cultural confidence and achieve spiritual independence. Cultural confidence should be integrated into the national spirit and cultural character, fostering a vibrant and balanced demeanor and mindset. "Art in China" is currently one of the most representative works of cultural confidence in China, and it stands as a successful case of promoting traditional Chinese culture. In conclusion, "Art in China" stands as an exemplary milestone in the world of art and cultural documentaries, serving not only as a captivating exploration of Chinese artistic heritage but also as a catalyst for innovation in the field. This documentary demonstrates how cutting-edge technology can bridge the gap between tradition and modernity, reinvigorating classic artworks and inviting audiences to experience them in a whole new dimension. By adopting 3D modelling, animation, and other advanced techniques, it revitalizes static masterpieces, bringing them to life and allowing viewers to immerse themselves in the artistry of each stroke and shade. Moreover, "Art in China" does more than just reinvigorate traditional art; it embodies the spirit of cultural confidence. It embodies the idea that by embracing our rich heritage while fearlessly exploring new frontiers, we can forge a vibrant path forward. In doing so, it contributes to the ongoing dialogue surrounding the importance of cultural preservation and innovation. As we navigate the ever-changing landscape of new media and digital storytelling, "Art in China" encourages us to cherish our cultural roots and look to the future with optimism. It showcases the limitless possibilities that lie at the intersection of art, technology, and culture. It is an invitation to all of us to keep pushing the boundaries of creativity, to keep telling the stories of our past in innovative ways, and to continue celebrating the enduring beauty of art in the 21st century and beyond.

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