

A Study on the Communication Strategy of the Image of Dabu in Zhuang Folk Stories under the Background of the New Era

Qianyi Zhu, Danya Liu*

School of Design, Guangxi Normal University, Guilin 541006, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China

*Corresponding author: Danya Liu, 453485595@qq.com

Copyright: © 2024 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: *A Piece of Zhuang Brocade (Yi Fu Zhuang Jin)* is a highly representative folk tale of the Zhuang people in Guangxi. The image of the heroine, Dabu, embodies the indomitable pursuit of happiness and the sacrificial spirit of dedication among the Zhuang people, showcasing the unique charm of Chinese traditional folk culture. In the context of the new era, the dissemination and development of Dabu's image present both opportunities and challenges. Therefore, it is necessary to follow current trends, adhere to the themes and aesthetics of the times, seek ways to highlight Dabu's character traits and cultural expression, and seize the opportunity to integrate modern elements and culture to promote the exemplary image of Zhuang women.

Keywords: Zhuang folktales; Dabu; Female image; Communication strategy

Online publication: February 27, 2024

1. Introduction

Dabu is the heroine of the Guangxi Zhuang folktale *A Piece of Zhuang Brocade (Yi Fu Zhuang Jin)*, which has promoted and spread the Zhuang people's love of life for thousands of years, expressing their desire for a better life and the pursuit of their ideals ^[1]. In 2008, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, the story was adapted into a tribute opera entitled "Zhuang Brocade" ("*Zhuang Jin*"), garnering significant major awards. Initially expected to become Guangxi's new emblem, "Zhuang Brocade" quickly faded from prominence after only a few years, and the heroine Dabu fell into obscurity. As an exemplary component of Guangxi's ethnic culture, the dissemination and preservation of Dabu's character image and its cultural significance face significant challenges in today's era of rapid development. Exploring how to unearth the distinctive characteristics of ethnic minorities and further propagate and evolve them through modern artistic forms is a matter deserving of attention.

Examining more successful cases of national image dissemination reveals that dissemination strategies and methods evolve in tandem with the prevailing backgrounds and themes of the times, imprinting the

intellectual property (IP) image with a distinct brand reflective of the era ^[2]. Accordingly, this paper seeks to draw lessons from exemplary IP image practices in character innovation, cultural industry creativity, and other communication strategies. By blending Zhuang culture with contemporary aesthetics, this study aims to explore the potential for developing Dabu's character image and employing diverse communication channels to embed Dabu deeper into the collective consciousness.

2. Status and dilemma of Dabu's dissemination

2.1. Current status of dissemination

A Piece of Zhuang Brocade originally circulated as a folk legend within the Zhuang region. Subsequently, literary workers adapted it into a literary piece during the process of collecting and arranging folk tales. In 1959, the Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio transformed it into an animated film, presenting it to audiences in a new medium. Further enriching the narrative, it was later adapted into a tribute opera in 2008, gradually introducing Dabu to a wider audience. In recent years, with the diversified development of cultural and artistic forms, the tale has been presented to the public in the form of picture books. It is evident that the dissemination of Dabu culture has received support from the state, government, and enterprises, consciously promoting, excavating, creating, and disseminating the image of Zhuang female characters. However, despite these efforts, the image of Dabu has not achieved the expected dissemination effect, and some individuals remain unfamiliar with her. The uniqueness of the character's appearance and the limitations of the presentation methods are factors contributing to the insufficient communication impact of Dabu's image.

2.2. Dissemination dilemma

With the changing times, media reports have become one of the primary means through which the public understands national culture. The continuous evolution of the Internet has diversified communication channels, rendering the previous portrayal of Dabu inadequate to meet market demands.

2.2.1. The image does not conform to mainstream aesthetics

The dissemination of a national image represents the will of the country and embodies the mainstream ideology, which should meet certain aesthetic standards and be representative ^[3]. However, Dabu's portrayal in its current form lacks sufficient appeal. For instance, in the film adaptation "A Piece of Zhuang Brocade," Dabu's appearance adheres to traditional Zhuang attire, including a black Zhuang dress and characteristic turban, evoking a sense of simplicity and warmth. While initially groundbreaking, this portrayal has become outdated over time, failing to capture the essence of Zhuang culture and leaving the character less memorable to audiences ^[4]. Subsequent adaptations, such as the 2008 opera "Zhuang Brocade," improved upon the costumes with vibrant colors and intricate embroidery, yet they remained bound by tradition, lacking the creativity demanded by modern aesthetics. Similarly, in the 2021 picture book "A Zhuang Brocade," Dabu's portrayal regresses to a simplistic depiction without unique character traits, merely representing a traditional Zhuang female figure. In today's era of information overload, where cultural images abound, Dabu's "non-mainstream" aesthetic struggles to compete with more visually striking representations. In this rapidly evolving landscape of values, how Dabu's image can carve out a niche remains a significant challenge.

2.2.2. Insufficient innovation in storylines

Ethnic storytelling serves as a precious cultural legacy, but a reluctance to deviate from tradition may hinder the evolution of plotlines. While folk-inspired narratives surrounding Dabu exude authenticity, they often lack

innovation and fail to resonate with contemporary audiences. One notable deficiency lies in character depth. Psychological portrayal and character development are crucial for audience engagement, yet current media portrayals of Dabu remain superficial, hindering emotional connection. Additionally, pacing issues arise, with excessive focus on mundane activities like brocade weaving, deterring modern audiences accustomed to faster-paced narratives. Furthermore, the direct expression of themes lacks modern nuance, failing to captivate audiences seeking more sophisticated storytelling. Without reinterpretation and expansion of storyline content, Dabu's dissemination is impeded, limiting its reach and impact.

2.2.3. The fragmentation of image and storyline

As communication channels diversify, Dabu's image must find a unique selling point to stand out. Furthermore, it should complement regional culture, as exemplified by Liu Sanjie's association with mountain songs. However, Dabu's connection to the Zhuang brocade, the central theme of her story, is often overlooked. Presentations of Dabu vary across media, but they often detach her from Zhuang brocade and Guangxi's cultural context. Bridging this gap and aligning Dabu with Zhuang brocade as a regional cultural symbol would enhance her dissemination and convey the rich cultural values she embodies.

3. The communication strategy of Dabu's image

In the ongoing exploration of national cultural inheritance and development, it is evident that mere continuity isn't sufficient. It is essential to distill the essence, discard the flaws, and craft compelling narratives with vibrant characters that resonate with contemporary audiences. To meet the demands of modern society and audience expectations, while preserving the allure of traditional national culture, certain innovations and adjustments are necessary in the communication strategy. This paper proposes the following improvement measures to address the current communication challenges faced by Dabu's image.

3.1. Tapping into the inner beauty of characters and adjusting image modeling

The current depiction of Dabu lacks distinction, necessitating a breakthrough to create a character with the quintessence of the Zhuang people and in tune with contemporary aesthetics. As a Zhuang IP image, Dabu's independence and pursuit of happiness are her defining traits. Through self-media platforms, she can be portrayed as a woman with her own aspirations rather than reliant on others. This character portrayal not only piques the audience's interest and resonance but also renders the character more relatable and authentic.

Regarding appearance, while retaining traditional elements, efforts can be made to incorporate modern design elements such as sleek cuts and fashionable color schemes to align Dabu's attire with contemporary aesthetic sensibilities. Drawing inspiration from successful national character designs, such as Liu Sanjie, another member of the Zhuang ethnic group, who has undergone extensive cross-disciplinary collaborations to enhance her image's appeal and influence, can be beneficial. Similarly, taking cues from iconic characters like Sun Wukong (Monkey King) from "Havoc in Heaven," innovative image designs can inject freshness and visual impact.

Moreover, technology integration could be utilized to digitally showcase Dabu's character. By leveraging technologies such as visual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), her traditional culture and stories can be digitally presented, enabling audiences to interact and immerse themselves in her world via devices such as mobile phones, computers, or VR glasses. This immersive experience would enhance their connection with the character.

3.2. Introducing modern elements and innovative presentation methods

The folk story of “A Piece of Zhuang Brocade” should align with the prevailing themes of the times and captivate the audience’s attention. Drawing inspiration from films like “The Tales of Effendi,” the story’s content can be delivered humorously and vividly, addressing contemporary societal issues and challenges. This approach not only infuses freshness into the narrative but also stimulates audience interest in the characters. Similarly, referencing animations like “Havoc in Heaven,” wherein the charm of the protagonist is enriched through interactions with other characters and the depth of the storyline, Dabu can adopt similar communication strategies. By integrating traditional and modern elements and exploring social issues, Dabu’s narrative can resonate with audiences on multiple levels. This integration may include traditional Zhuang music alongside modern Chinese and Western instruments, setting the story in a modern context, and employing innovative means of expression such as humorous dialogue and exquisite special effects to enhance viewer engagement and communication effectiveness.

3.3. Strengthening branding and enhancing symbolic value

Dabu embodies the humanistic attributes of sincerity and kindness inherent in Zhuang culture, symbolizing the Zhuang people’s pursuit of happiness and the auspiciousness associated with the Zhuang brocade ^[5]. To enhance Dabu’s communication impact, it is imperative to closely associate her with Zhuang brocade in the narrative, thus reinforcing brand-building efforts. Much like Liu Sanjie’s enduring influence, who utilized folk songs to shape her image across ethnic boundaries, Dabu can leverage Zhuang brocade to integrate traditional culture with contemporary aesthetics, thereby shaping a brand image reflective of Guangxi’s regional culture ^[6]. Additionally, leveraging various online platforms for publicity can help Dabu stand out in a competitive market landscape, fostering a national symbol with influence and shaping power while continuously strengthening the symbolic value of her character image.

4. Conclusion

Dabu not only embodies the image of hardworking, kind-hearted, and dexterous Zhuang women but also serves as a symbol of Zhuang culture. Shaping and disseminating her image hold immense significance for the inheritance and development of Zhuang culture. In the ever-evolving backdrop of changing times, the transformation of Dabu’s image and communication strategy must adapt accordingly. It is essential to infuse new creativity and vitality into Dabu’s story, focusing on character portrayal, plot development, dissemination breadth, and strength to enrich the beauty and authenticity of her character image.

Moreover, emphasis should be placed on preserving traditional cultural heritage and characteristics, while presenting Dabu in a manner that harmoniously blends traditional charm with modernity. In conclusion, the dissemination of Dabu’s image is a multifaceted and crucial endeavor, necessitating attention to cultural nuances, dissemination methodologies, post-release promotion, and other facets. Implementing effective measures to enhance and optimize the dissemination effect is paramount.

Funding

2023 Guangxi Higher Education Young Teachers’ Research Capability Enhancement Project “Research on the Animation Transformation and Communication Strategy of Female Images in Zhuang Ethnic Intangible Cultural Heritage Folk Stories” (Project number: 2023KY0052); 2023 Special Project of Guangxi 14th Five-Year Plan for Educational Science “Revitalization of Non-Heritage – Integration of Industry and Education

– Research on the Service of Regional Economic Development of Design Professional Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education in Guangxi Colleges and Universities” (Project number: 2023ZJY1836)

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Zhou Z, Huang S, Ouyang R, et al., 2007, History of the Development of Zhuang Literature. Guangxi People Publisher, Nanning.
- [2] Yang N, 1998, The Evolution of Liu Sanjie’s Image. Research on Ethnic Literature, 1998(1): 64–67.
- [3] Wu Q, 2022, Study on the Communication Value of Liu Sanjie’s Ballad in Self-Media Under the Perspective of Cultural Soft Power Construction. Guangxi Ethnic Studies, 2022(2): 174–181.
- [4] Zeng X, 2014, Study on the Use of Zhuang Clothing Culture in Animation Characters – Taking “A Piece of Zhuang Brocade” as an Example. Science and Education Wenhui (Zhongxian), 2014(11): 130–131.
- [5] Cao Q, Lv Z, 2023, Study on the Path of Creative Transformation and Innovative Development of Ethnic Traditional Culture – Taking Caixiang Opera “New Liu Sanjie” as an Example. Guangxi Ethnic Studies, 2023(3): 146–151.
- [6] Cen X, 2009, Let the Intangible Cultural Heritage “Live” – A Brief Comment on Guangxi Opera “Zhuang Jin”. Songhai, 2009(4): 12–14.

Publisher’s note

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.