

“The Temple Check-in Craze”: An Aesthetic Communication Analysis of Traditional Culture in the New Media Context

Xiaoya Sun

Department of Cultural Management, Shanghai Publishing and Printing College, Shanghai, 200093, China

Abstract: This article takes the phenomenon of “temple check-in craze” as the analysis object, and from the perspective of aesthetic communication, deeply explores the inevitability of combining traditional cultural communication with New media from the perspective of self media. Explored the reference significance and existing problems of new communication paradigms for the dissemination of traditional cultural aesthetics, and proposed corresponding methods and ideas.

Keywords: Traditional culture; New media; Esthetics; Communication

In the current new media background, how to adapt excellent Chinese traditional culture to the modern context and integrate it better with the continuously evolving modern aesthetics has always been a topic of interest.^[1] From various aspects of social society, it is confirmed that the express of traditional culture is entering a new stage of aesthetic communication. The spread of cultural aesthetics is developing with an expanding momentum, from designs relevant to Chinese culture to popular phenomena such as the “Sanxingdui craze, “ content creators like “Li Ziqi, “ and events like the Henan Spring Festival evening party.^[2]

1. The phenomenon of “Temple Check-in craze”

As the epidemic ends, the tourism industry is gradually recovering. After the spring of this year, temple tourism suddenly became a popular consumption destination, especially among young people who have become the main force in visiting temples. According to data from a certain travel platform, from February to now this year, among consumers booking temple tickets online, post-90s and post-00s account for close to 50%. The popular temple scenic spot, Yongfu Temple in Hangzhou, has its coffee become a “must-have” item for college students this year, making Yongfu Temple a “internet-famous temple.” Consumers even line up for an hour just to buy a cup of “mercy” coffee.

Table 1: Statistical Analysis of Temple Scenic Area Ticket Reservations on Ctrip.com in February 2023

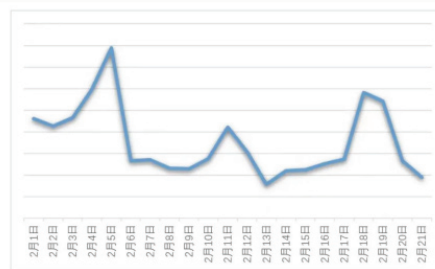


Table 2: HugeV Engine Q1 2023 Data Statistics



The phenomenon of “Temple Hot” occurs through the form of self-media dissemination. Young people, as the disseminators of this phenomenon, are also heavy users of self-media. Data from the Douyin platform shows that Lingyin Temple has 180, 000 followers. They deconstruct traditional cultural elements in temples, with the unique architecture of temples such as red walls and black tiles becoming the first reconstructed cultural elements that young people are passionate about. Therefore, “temple check-in photos” have become the first appearance of content on new media platforms. This has led to secondary dissemination, with more attempts in terms of content and depth. Videos related to temple experiences by Bilibili influencers gain followers rapidly, with comments often mentioning things like “can’t reply to all the messages.” Temple-themed cafes have also emerged as new symbols for the dissemination of traditional cultural aesthetics, attracting young consumer groups in urban areas amidst the trend of coffee consumption, becoming a new “battlefield” for the dissemination of traditional cultural aesthetics.^[3]

On various social media platforms, photos and check-ins related to “temple cafes,” as well as sharing of purchasing guides, have very high click rates. The aesthetic dissemination of traditional culture among young people is also an “imagined community.” New media, as a new mass medium, has evidently become an important medium in the construction of this “community.” The strengthening of this sense of identity has driven the formation of a new dissemination trend and consciously led to secondary dissemination.

2. The inevitability of the phenomenon of “temple check-in craze.”

Traditional culture is formed in the continuous historical process of development. It exists in various aspects of the cultural daily lives, artistic aesthetics, values, and concepts of the Chinese people. In the long history of over five thousand years of civilization, the Chinese people have collectively created the splendid Chinese civilization, making significant contributions to the development of human civilization.

The excellent traditional Chinese culture provides abundant content for new media. Traditional Chinese culture still holds significant value and plays an important role in society today. Through the use of new media platforms, the aesthetics of traditional culture can be better integrated into social life, especially through the interpretation by young people in conjunction with modern lifestyles and aesthetics. The rich resources of traditional culture provide an endless source for new media communication. Temples, as scenes of traditional culture, merely represent a glimpse and reflection of the transmission of traditional aesthetics.

New media is also giving new vitality to traditional Chinese culture. Media is essentially technology-based. Through new media, young people have become innovators of Chinese traditional culture, awakening the dormant traditional culture with their vast numbers. They are also conducting new practices of disseminating traditional culture based on modern aesthetics. Deep cultural heritage and memory are reproduced, regenerated, and reconstructed through new media, reappearing as independent scenes. The easily communicable nature of these independent scenes provides more space and possibilities for secondary dissemination.

3. The drawbacks of transmitting traditional cultural aesthetics through new media

As a new type of modern and adaptable medium, new media with its audio-visual language expression is more secondarily transmissible and faster in dissemination speed. However, from the analysis of the phenomenon of “temple check-in craze”, it is not difficult to see that the integration of new media with the dissemination of traditional cultural aesthetics still has significant shortcomings and issues that cannot be ignored.^[4]

First of all, from big data, we can see that the “temple check-in craze” indeed has a strong viral nature in a short period. However, due to limitations imposed by the cognitive and cultural factors of self-media communicators, the dissemination of content varies widely in quality. This will inevitably have a certain impact on the aesthetic dissemination power of traditional culture, especially in terms of the audiovisual presentation of aesthetic dissemination. Particularly, there are incidents of damaging the temple environment and architecture to attract attention, even spreading pornographic content under the guise of “retro” and “traditional.” This kind of content creation not only fails to bring enjoyment in aesthetic dissemination but also to some extent obstructs and distorts the aesthetic dissemination of Chinese traditional culture.

Secondly, as new media, with the characteristics of fast dissemination and concise content, acts as an audiovisual media, it is more likely to superficially showcase traditional cultural aesthetics without displaying cultural depth. Simultaneously, in the media environment characterized by general entertainment, information often tends to be presented in a superficial and simplistic way. The profoundness of traditional culture and its superficial forms of expression evidently create contradictions and opposition. General entertainment, as an advanced form of entertainment, also reveals issues in the interpretive approach towards history and culture, such as the phenomenon of “temple check-in hotspots”. New media, due to its strong theatricality, compact rhythm, and rich visual effects, predominantly serves as a tool for entertainment-oriented communication. Moreover, new media, in order to cater to popular preferences, creates visual spectacles to offer audiences sensory pleasure experiences. The combination of new media and traditional culture will inevitably diminish the seriousness and historical weight of traditional culture in its presentation. The content of “temple check-ins” is popularized, entertainment-oriented, and geared towards a younger

audience, featuring content that aligns with general entertainment trends, such as “the ceiling of temples” and “scenic spots with few people but beautiful scenery.” Clearly, when traditional cultural aesthetics are presented through new media channels, it predominantly stimulates sensory pleasure and entertainment curiosity in audiences, causing them to overlook contemplation on the essence of traditional culture and potentially compromising the integrity of traditional cultural values.

4. Reflections on the Transmission of Traditional Cultural Aesthetics and New Media Communication

4.1 Improve the quality of communication and guide content innovation

We should not blindly pursue traffic or duplicate meaningless content. This kind of communication of traditional cultural aesthetics only stays at the visual level of beauty, which can easily become a passing trend and quickly lose its appeal. Clearly, this kind of communication of cultural aesthetics is fragmented, disconnected, and ultimately unsustainable. To apply modern aesthetic communication features and methods to traditional cultural aesthetics, we need to have cross-industry synergy with culture, art, tourism, and consumption. This will create innovative consumer scenarios that give urban life unique meaning, experiences, and emotional resonance.

4.2 In the context of cultural recognition, shaping traditional cultural aesthetics media spectacle

American scholar Douglas Kellner, in his classic work “Media Spectacle,” believes that media spectacles have clear thematic control and intentional expression. The visual images of the media, as the most effective form of spectacle, their substitution function makes “media spectacle” a common way of social landscape or reality. Therefore, the construction of media spectacle can establish a framework for the expression of traditional culture. For example, a company started from consumers’ childhood memories, evoke their empathy memory points and cultural identity, and create a brand new media landscape.

5. Conclusion

Cultural self-confidence is the spiritual cornerstone of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. In the dissemination of traditional culture aesthetics, temples, as traditional cultural artifacts, have gathered into new traffic scenes through different spatial carriers and embedded with different cultural connotations on new media platforms such as WeChat, Xiaohongshu, and TikTok. Young people are using the context of self-media to carry out new aesthetic dissemination of traditional culture. However, while affirming the new media traditional cultural aesthetic dissemination represented by the “temple check-in craze,” we should also see that the combination of new media and traditional cultural aesthetic dissemination still has significant shortcomings and problems that cannot be ignored. Only by improving the quality of communication, integrating modern aesthetics, and effectively innovating content can we establish a sustainable path for traditional aesthetic dissemination. It is only through a shared cultural memory and cultural identity framework that we can shape and convey the medium spectacle of the aesthetic dissemination of traditional culture effectively.

References

- [1] Jiehongyun, Li Xia. The Basic Path of Inheritance and Innovation of Excellent Traditional Etiquette Culture [J]. In the Era of Think Tank, 2019(11): 237-238
- [2] Fongmengyao, On the Expression of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture in Li Ziqi's Short Videos [D]. Master's Thesis at Yunnan University of Arts, 2022
- [3] Reflection on the "Temple fever": Why are more and more young people beginning to seek gods and worship Buddha?, <https://www.sohu.com/>
- [4] Liu Wang Behind the popularity of "temple coffee": a new scene of manufacturing and consumption[N].2023-3-27