

Auditory Reinvention in the Digital Age: A Triple Translation Strategy for Ritual Sounds in Chinese Cinema

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Abstract: As the core element of traditional culture, rituals inherit the collective memory of the nation through physical exercises and symbolic symbols. Sound is an indispensable sound medium in the ceremonial field, and it is also an important component of traditional auditory culture. In the contemporary deeply mediated society, film sound reconstructs ritual sound and incorporates it into the category of film narrative, which has become an emerging form of communication for traditional cultural inheritance and cross-media translation. This study focuses on the modern reconstruction strategy of film sound to ritual sound, investigates the practice of film sound design in China, and proposes a three-fold path of ritual sound image translation: the construction of ritual structure map through the repetitive coding of sound symbols, the iterative formation of dynamic sound narrative with the help of sound texture technology, and the construction of virtual sound field space to shape the sacred ritual field. The research breaks through the framework of traditional narratology and provides an interdisciplinary research path for the innovative practice and dissemination of traditional sound culture in the digital age.

Keywords: Film sound; Ritual sounds; Symbol; Voiceprint; Space

In the contemporary context of media technology reconstructing traditional cultural expressions, film sound is becoming an important carrier for the modernization and translation of traditional Chinese auditory culture. Ritual music is the origin of the emergence and development of traditional Chinese auditory culture, which condenses the profound national collective memory, and the sound medium reconstructs the auditory memory of ritual music rituals, and explicitly focuses on the translation of film sound to ritual sound. It is a useful measure to promote the creative transformation and modern dissemination of traditional Chinese auditory culture to explore how the sound design of modern films is intertwined with traditional ritual performances, and how to encode traditional ritual sounds in audio-visual media with the intervention of digital technology, so as to construct the psychological identity of modern people with traditional cultural memory, emotion and community.

1. Ritual sound and video transmission

"Ritual sound" refers to the overall sound environment of a ritual site, including human voices, music, and all sounds produced by the participants' body movements and props used in the ritual performance. Chinese scholar Cao Benye focused on Chinese folk rituals, and on the basis of a deep understanding of the importance of sound media in the ritual field, he clearly put forward the term "ritual sound", pointing out that "ritual sound" is the sound that can be heard and cannot be heard in all ritual behaviors, and has a specific meaning for insiders, including music in a general sense, so that the definition of ritual sound covers the internal and external auditory environment, and the symbolic meaning of sound is settled in the context of traditional Chinese ritual and music culture, and completes the "shouting, shouting, Chanting, singing, percussion, dance rhythm, music performance, etc.

In the study of film and television communication, the connection between ritual and image is mainly carried out in two contexts: anthropological ethnographic image and popular film. As a "storage device" of cultural memory, anthropological ethnographic images are based on the ritual itself and the image as a means to carry out rescue recording, inheritance and dissemination in the face of various endangered traditional rituals, and its core value is to collect and record endangered rituals and sound traditions through image recording, and store them as archival documents. The French scholar Paul Henley took the lead in putting forward the concept of "film as ethnography", advocating the use of film to record the body language, vocal performance and spatial field of ritual activities, and advocating the use of "anthropological participatory observation method as the core of ethnographic filmmaking", regarding the image as a modern tool for anthropological research. On the other hand, in the field of popular cinema, rituals and ritual sounds are creatively translated into the audiovisual narrative of video works as constituent elements. Under the dual influence of film and television narrative and artistic aesthetic context, the encoding and translation

of rituals and sounds in film has developed a dual dimension: the narrative dimension, rituals and sounds constitute the driving force for plot development, and the cultural modes and cultural meanings contained in the ritual procedures of folk rituals and the film stories with realistic connotations have mutual dissolution and fusion mechanisms, which also form a unique and interesting narrative style. The aesthetic dimension forms an aesthetic intention with cultural metaphorical function through the integration of symbolic reconstruction and audio-visual rhetoric. For example, "the cultural connotation of the nation and the country is fused into the artistic beauty of the national ritual image, and the national spiritual and cultural connotation is inherited and continued through the dissemination and sharing of video art." "Compared with ethnographic images, popular films are more artistically appealing in their consideration and translation of rituals and sounds, and the symbolic expression of ritual visuals and sound symbols is intuitive and popular, which shows significant advantages in promoting the emotional resonance of the audience.

2. Structural narrative under symbolic repetition

The ritual itself is a symbolic system, and the film sound creator reorganizes the time, space and structure of the ritual performance, and refines and repeats some of the sound symbols of the ritual sound to carry out a structural narrative of the ritual, that is, to identify the different stages of the ritual process. Through the music arrangement, rhythm density, frequency changes, as well as the cyclic and differentiated arrangement of sound spatial attributes, the repetitive operation of the ritual program is expressed, and the linear structure nodes and spatio-temporal logic of the ritual are marked, so that the ritual process and the logic of the film narrative are deeply integrated.

Director Zhang Yimou's films often use the "repetitive performance" of ritual sound symbols to reconstruct Chinese vernacular rituals, making them metaphorical carriers of cultural struggles, and creating a typical example for the film's image translation practice of ritual sounds. For example, in the film *Red Sorghum* (Zhang Yimou, 1987), in the passage "Brewing and Sacrificing to the Gods", the sound of drums, horns, and the wheezing sound of labor constitute a triple repetitive symbolic soundscape: the drum cycle is fixed in a group of two beats, marking the beginning of the sacrificial ceremony and the interval between the passages; The density of the drum beats increases rhythmically as the winemaking ritual progresses, from loose to dense, expressing the narrative intent of the transition from "human" to "divine"; After each vat of fermentation is completed, the horn sounds, and the pitch rises one by one, symbolizing the staged satisfaction of the wine-making results to the collective beliefs of the ethnic group. The repetition of sound symbols in the film constructs a three-stage ritual structure of "human labor-Dionysian apparition-ethnic celebration", which detaches the winemaking process from the behavioral category of daily labor and sublimates it into a deified narrative of vitality. The opening scene of another film work, *Man Jianghong* (Zhang Yimou, 2023), simulates the program of an opera performance, with a bass drum beat to enter, and the film is placed in the program ritual scene of the opera performance, with the investigation advancing, the drum beat accelerates, and is abruptly interrupted at key nodes (such as Liu Xi's sacrifice and Yaoqin's assassination), and the rhythm of the drum cycle and mutation clearly points out the three main story structure passages of "the initiation and release of the countdown of life, the recovery and advancement of the runaway assassination, and the Jedi counterattack after the failure". At the end of the film, the character leads all the soldiers to recite Yue Fei's poem "Man Jianghong" repeatedly, presenting a scene of collective tribute to national heroes. Poetry recitation is repeated between different characters, forming artificial sound waves. The difference in the tone of each character when reciting forms a frequency resonance in the process of group recitation, expanding the narrative space from the closed prime minister's mansion to a grander historical dimension, and completing the spiritual sublimation from individual life to family and country in the final stage of the memorial ceremony.

3. Multiple metaphors in the iteration of "voiceprint"

In the film video, there is a significant difference between the listening effect of the ritual sound and the original performance scene, and the source of the difference lies in the change of "sound texture" with the participation of audio technology. The original form of ritual sound is extracted from the original sound performance form, and the technical parameters of the physical properties of the sound (frequency, amplitude, reverberation time, etc.) are changed by superimposition, forming a hybrid form of interweaving the original sound and the technical effect sound, and the sound as a whole is more in line with the audio-visual aesthetic standards in the modern media technology environment. At the same time, in the iteration of technical textures, multiple metaphors are given to the mixed sounds.

With the development of natural science, the sound heard by human beings has gradually been scientifically interpreted, and the researcher Nicolas Saint-Arnaud has drawn on the research ideas of visual texture to take a microscopic perspective of sound from the perspective of auditory perception and cognitive science, and regarded sound as a collection formed by various internal components and organizational methods, and called it "sound texture". He explained that "sound texture" is a phenomenon in which simple sound elements called atoms constitute a lower level, and the distribution and arrangement of atoms constitute a higher level of two levels. This concept is introduced in the field of computer audio technology, and the texture data analysis and synthesis algorithm research and development of sound signals are

implemented, and the computer auditory perception model is established for audio scene analysis, language and music emotion recognition, biomedical signals, computer audio recognition and sound synthesis, creative art and recommendation system. In the application of film sound production, the introduction of sound texture is manifested as the dimension of parameters that give the physical texture of the audio (such as roughness, brightness, and spatial sense), such as acoustic parameters such as frequency, amplitude, reflection, and attenuation time. The single value of physical parameter control carries a richer metaphorical meaning.

In the film narrative of ritual sounds, the audience will generate metaphorical associations in auditory associations according to the clues of the change of sound texture. For example, the famous suona song "Hundred Birds and Phoenix" in the film "Hundred Birds and Phoenix" (Wu Tianming, 2013) represents the highest level of suona performance, which is used in funeral ceremonies, which is not only a tribute to the virtues of the deceased, but also a musical image to educate and set an example. When the protagonist of the film, Jiao Sanye, blew the music for the first time, the suona music was added to the loudness crescendo processing, and gradually extracted from the sound field of the live performance.

In addition to live-action films, in animated films such as *Big Fish and Begonia* (Liang Xuan and Zhang Chun, 2016), *Lion Boy* (Sun Haipeng, 2021), and *Thirty Thousand Miles of Chang'an* (Xie Junwei and Zou Jing, 2023), the voiceprint embedding and metaphor of ritual sounds are more prominent and active. For example, in the animated film *Nezha: The Demon Boy in the Sea* (Dumplings, 2025), the singing of Humai, which is used in Mongolian festival ceremonies, is repeatedly used in the theocratic sacrifice scene represented by Tian Yuanding at the back of the film. When the ancient artifact Tian Yuan Ding first appeared, the sound of the microphone was coordinated with a high-amplitude low-frequency hum to create a sense of mystery and oppression, symbolizing the irreversibility of the laws of heaven; Under the Tianyuan Ding, Nezha resists, and the same voice is processed in an ascending tone, superimposed with electronic distortion, and the rhythm is broken, which is a metaphor for the individual's rebellion against fate and the division of order; Nezha Nirvana, Tianyuan Ding Breaks, the sound of the microphone turns into an ethereal overtone, and the reverberation space extends infinitely, suggesting the reconciliation of divinity and humanity. Through the "upscaling design" of the voiceprint in the three repetitions of the microphone, the film sublimates the ritual symbol into a philosophical inquiry into the will of the personality, and completes the auditory metaphor for the construction of the character's spiritual world.

4. The creation of a sound field in the "sanctified" space

Ritual space is a space category virtualized by the arrangement of scene props, the setting of performance behaviors and the psychological time and space of participants on the basis of the physical material space of ritual performance, which is the overlap of material space and psychological space. The ritual prop arrangement, body performances, and cabaret performances create a virtual situation that transforms the concrete secular space into a sacred space that transcends time and space, thereby sanctifying the space. "One of the most explicit functions of religious celebrations is to distance the 'sacred' from the 'secular' through ritualized acts", allowing participants to gain spiritual comfort in the process of transformation from the secular to the sacred.

The application of digital audio space technology in film sound creation constructs a sense of simulation and immersion in the real environment for ceremonial performances, and also creates more possibilities for surreal sound field imagination. By separating, modulating, frequencies, dynamics, sound source locations, or superimposing synthesized sounds on the original sounds, the creators create a more three-dimensional sense of depth, simulate the sacred sound field, and transform the real space into an "auditory temple". For example, in the Taoist Jiao Ceremony in *Breaking Hell* (Chen Maoxian, 2024), the copper bell is mixed with high-frequency overtones in the original recording, simulating the auditory illusion of "magic instrument channeling", and at the same time creating a dynamic displacement of the sound source pulling from back to front, expressing the penetrating power of the copper bell, which is a metaphor for the psychological shock of the ritual to the audience. The sound of Fahai's chanting in *White Snake: Floating Life* (Chen Jianxi & Li Jiakai, 2024) simulates the sound field of the stupa dome through reverberation technology, giving the scriptures an auditory texture suspended in the air. In the treatment of natural environmental sounds, the low-frequency reduction of natural sounds such as wind sounds and sleeve sounds highlights the non-secular nature of the ceremony scene. In the animated film *Jiang Ziya* (Li Wei, 2018), in ritual scenes such as slaying demons on the rooftop, meeting Tianzun, and martyrdom, the sound creates a diffuse and immersive sound field by integrating a variety of high-frequency timbre elements, extending the attenuation time of the human voice, expanding the field space of sound diffusion, and increasing the distance between sound sources.

5. Epilogue

As a state of etiquette, Chinese traditional ceremonies are grand and extraordinary, with profound meanings, carrying the memory of Chinese history and culture, and the ritual sound is used as a memory carrier to provide historical texts and cultural background for film sound

creation. At the same time, it also stimulates film sound creation and theoretical research to construct an analytical model of "technology-culture-aesthetics", incorporates interdisciplinary theoretical dialogues, and helps researchers clarify the logical connection between audio technology, cultural texts, and image representations. In this way, when faced with the question of how to creatively inherit the Chinese cultural genes, we can connect the cultural symbols of sound with the film narrative, and achieve a breakthrough in the research paradigm from "sound borrowing" to "symbiosis of meaning".

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