

Culture Exhibition and Image Construction: The Hangzhou Asian Games from the Perspective of Media Rituals

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Abstract. This article provides an in-depth interpretation of the cultural exhibitions during the Hangzhou Asian Games by integrating the theories of media events and media rituals. It comprehensively considers the reproduction of symbolic content and the resonance of communication channels. Through analysis of the natural symbols, cultural symbols, and character symbols presented during the opening and closing ceremonies and throughout the competition venues, along with their underlying significance and meaning, this study explores the process of cultural fusion and recreation. Furthermore, it summarizes the role of diverse communicators, such as official media and social media, as well as intelligent immersive communication technologies, such as “digital integration,” cloud-based broadcasting, and bullet-time techniques. The study argues that large-scale sports events generate distinct communication effects on both domestic and international levels. It explores the entire process of cultural exhibitions that can be achieved by event organizers relying on large-scale sports events, and highlights the role of these events in constructing national and city images. The goal is to foster a collective identification with specific values among a wide range of individuals.

keywords: media rituals, image construction, The 19th Hangzhou Asian Games

1 Introduction

In recent years, several international sporting events have taken place in various Chinese cities. Each event serves not only as a cultural exhibition but also an opportunity for national and city image construction. With media coverage and self-media communication, sporting events have become media events, and the various symbols involved in these events constitute meaningful media rituals. Drawing on the theories of media events and media rituals, this paper provides an in-depth interpretation and analysis of the cultural symbols in the Hangzhou Asian Games, exploring the complete process of cultural exhibitions that the organizers can achieve through hosting major sports events, as well as the role of event hosting in national and city image construction.

2 Theoretical Foundation of Media Events and Media Rituals

The concept of the “media event” was introduced by the French scholar Daniel Dayan and the Israeli sociologist Elihu Katz in their 1992 publication “Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History”. It refers to events that are televised, have explicit performative characteristics, and follow specific rules. These events often attract national and global attention through live television broadcasts, creating a shared historical memory by constructing and sharing ritualized symbols to highlight particular “sacred values”[1].

The concept of media rituals finds its roots in the ritual perspective emphasized by American communication scholar James·W·Carey. He emphasized the significant role of communication in social cohesion, highlighting the core concept of “a sacred ceremony that brings people together with a collective identity.” James applied semiotic theory to analyze communication content instead of information studies. The “meaning” of symbol changes is closely related to specific social and cultural contexts[2]. Through the interpretation of symbols, the cultural significance of communication can be analyzed[3]. Throughout the media coverage of the Hangzhou Asian Games, the “signified” behind the various national and city symbols reflects the exhibition and construction effects achieved through various media rituals[4].

The coverage of the Asian Games is undeniably a highly significant news event. The rise of digital media and convergence technology, the expanding communication channels and increased communication space have made the media more decentralized and dispersed. In the digital era, the audience is no longer merely passive recipients compared to traditional media audiences; rather, they actively enter the media space, completes the media rituals and develop a digital memory[5].

3 Media Ritual Diversity Shaping Cultural Imagery and Image Construction

National image pertains to the assessment and perception of a country's existence under specific circumstances. In a nutshell, a country is not only perceived and recognized as an object of an image but can also proactively influence this image[6]. According to the renowned communication scholar Harold Lasswell, communication may be studied through five elements: the sender, the audience, the channel, the content, and the effect. Referring to the model of the correlation between national media rituals and the construction of national image in the research on sports spirit and the construction of national image by scholar Luo Kunjin, the author believes that the Hangzhou Asian Games, as a highly anticipated event in Asia and the world, has become a hub for international communication and exchange based on the common destiny of humanity, the media as the flesh and blood, and the sports spirit as the soul. It condenses the complete process of cultural exhibition and image construction carried out by the country, focusing on the three aspects of content, channel, and effect, which interact with each other as shown in Fig 1:

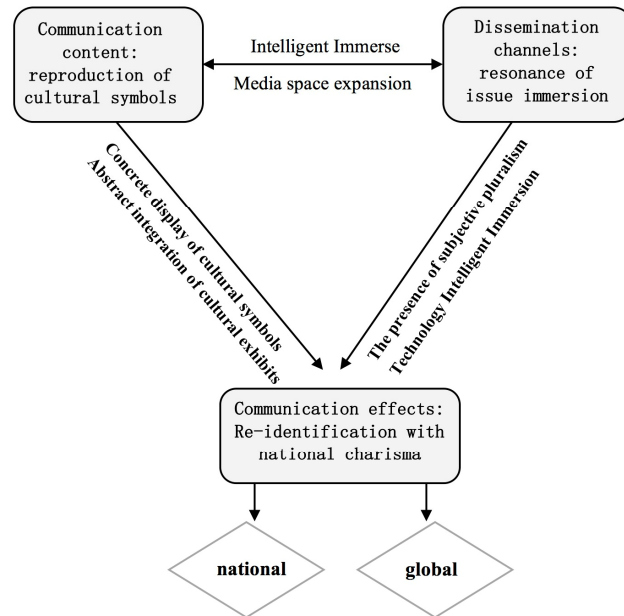


Fig. 1. the three aspects of content, channel, and effect

3.1 Communication Content: Reproduction of Cultural Symbols

3.1.1 Tangible Cultural Symbols

The Hangzhou Asian Games boasts numerous meticulously crafted cultural emblems, logos, and performances showcased at the opening ceremony, as well as torches, mascots, and the images of athletes and volunteers. Through the analysis of relevant content, the following tangible symbols can be summarized as shown in Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3:

Table 1. Natural Symbols

Asian Games-related Content	Symbol
Emblem	Qiantang River and Qiantang Tide
Mascot Chenchen	Robot shape and Qiantang tidal wave
Mascot Lianlian	Robot shape, West Lake and lotus flower
Olympic Sports Center Stadium	Lotus
Gold medal	West Lake and Lotus
Water of Opening Ceremony	Chinese culture “Water is benevolent and good”, Hangzhou “Prospering through water”

Table 2. Humanistic Symbols

Asian Games-related Content	Symbol
“Osmanthus” of Opening ceremony	Hangzhou's city flower and Chinese fragrance
“Thousand-Mile of Landscape Painting” of Opening ceremony	Chinese national treasure and Chinese art
“Jiangnan Life–style” of Opening ceremony	Calligraphy, painting, tea ceremony, incense burning, seal carving, chess playing, sword dancing, poetry reciting
Emblem design	Chinese fan shape
Combination name of the mascot	Bai Juyi's famous poem “Hangzhou is the most Memorable place of Jiangnan “
Mascot Congcong	Robot shape, Liangzhu culture, “taotie pattern”
Mascot Chenchen	World heritage, Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal
Silver medal	World heritage, Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal
Bronze medal	Liangzhu culture
Core graphics “Moistening”	Silk
Award bouquet “Bountiful harvest”	National intangible heritage: Dongyang wood carving
Chinese delegation’s official attire	Blue and white porcelain
Opening and closing ceremony dates	From the Autumn Equinox to the Cold Dew, the handover of lotus and laurel in the golden autumn season

Table 3. Character Symbols

Asian Games-related Content	Symbol
Volunteers	Serious, hardworking, dedicated
Athletes	Strive, persevere, never giving up
Live DJ	Youthful energy, internet-savvy
Cheerleading team	Beauty, suitable for both ancient and modern times (Chinese style, Hanfu, traditional opera, Legend of the White Snake, nunchaku etc.)
Digital beings	Representing technological development and the image of Hangzhou as an internet city
President of Syria and his wife	Symbolizing world peace, harmony, and the spirit of sportsmanship and a great nation

Based on the table shown above, it can be observed that the Asian Games mainly feature three types of tangible symbols. Firstly, there are natural symbols representing the pulse of the East, including the unique landscapes of the Qiantang River and Qiantang Tidal Bore as well as the beautiful West Lake and the lotus symbol. Secondly, there are cultural symbols that exude

Chinese-style romance, such as the 24 solar terms that China showcased at the Winter Olympics and are being perpetuated in the Asian Games. The People's Daily commented that the competition period of the Asian Games starts from the Autumnal Equinox and ends at the Cold Dew, which represents the golden autumn season when lotus and osmanthus intertwine. These solar terms represent Chinese wisdom[7], and calligraphy, painting, tea ceremony, incense burning, seal carving, chess playing, sword dancing, and poetry recitation represent Chinese lifestyle. Liangzhu Culture, the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal, and the saying "most unforgettable is the Jiangnan region" represent Chinese civilization. Thirdly, there are representative figures that embody the grand ambition of a great nation, such as the visit of the Syrian president and his wife during the opening ceremony of the Hangzhou Asian Games, symbolizing global peace and common prosperity. The "Xiao Qinghe" volunteers' uniform and synchronized movements represent strong support, and the professional and confident performance of on-site broadcasters and DJ personnel embody their professional attitude. Among the figures, the intense competition and friendly interaction among athletes from different countries on the field have become a beautiful scenery of the Asian Games. For example, the diving duo Chen Yuxi and Quan Hongchan demonstrated their outstanding athletic skills, which amazed the world.

Zhang Yufei and Japanese swimmer Rikako Ikee, who had leukemia, hugged each other tightly after the swimming competition, showing the mutual respect between athletes. This gesture has been widely praised by foreign media, and many foreign netizens have expressed their admiration for the brilliance of human nature, which represents China's friendly and kind image. Among all the figures in the Asian Games, there is a special character that appears in both the opening and closing ceremonies: the torchbearer "Digital beings." This character is composed of over one hundred million interactive netizens and represents the realization of the director's and the entire organizing committee's creativity[8]. This "Digital beings" not only symbolizes the unity of the people but also showcases China's status as a technological powerhouse.

3.1.2 Abstract Fusion of Cultural Exhibitions

Throughout the Asian Games, one can witness the splendid civilization of traditional culture, the technological brilliance of digital culture, and the modern image of integration.

Firstly, the brilliant civilization of traditional culture shines in the venue of the Asian Games. When the dynamic sports icon appears, it is accompanied by the music of Jiangnan silk and bamboo, which combines drum music, perfectly integrating the charm of the Jiangnan water town with the power of sports. The architectural design of the Olympic Sports Center resembles a lotus flower, which is a representative symbol of China and implies a Chinese style of being pure and elegant. Various aspects of Jiangnan life were showcased during the opening ceremony: a welcoming performance using "shuiyucong" to greet the athletes, screen displays resembling folding fans during the entrance of the athletes, and a gradually unfolding Chinese lifestyle scroll composed of calligraphy, painting, tea ceremony, incense burning, seal carving, chess playing, sword dancing, and poetry recitation.

Secondly, the technological brilliance of digital culture radiates with humanistic glory. The first thing worth mentioning is the "Digital Human Torchbearer" that amazed the world during the opening ceremony. As early as November 2022, the Hangzhou Asian Games Organizing Committee launched the "Asian Games Digital Torchbearer" initiative, inviting netizens from

more than 130 countries and regions to participate as digital torchbearers through the “Smart Asian Games All-in-One” platform for online torch relay. Therefore, the digital image representing over one hundred million digital torchbearers runs through the venue, igniting the torch tower. At that moment, people from around the world are truly connected. GO1”, a robotic dog that runs around the track and field stadium picking up discus, and “GO2”, an interactive robotic dog. The dynamic sports icon design adhered to functional principles and adopted motion capture and game engine core technology to interpret the “trend” of sports movement through a three-part process of dynamic motion, background refresh, and frame presentation. The Hangzhou Asian Games is the first carbon-neutral Asian Games, adhering to the concept of “Green Games” and China's “carbon neutrality” initiative. It uses green materials and technologies, such as environmentally friendly electronic fireworks, to achieve the commitment of “zero carbon in hosting the Games.” The ritual dress of the cauldron lighting ceremony used “3D printing technology” to create an oriental style. The Hangzhou Asian Games launched an intelligent experience line, where vehicles equipped with the necessary technology can accurately identify roads, vehicles, pedestrians, traffic lights, and various obstacles, ensuring smooth travel. During the opening day of the Hangzhou Asian Games, a system group for event results release was launched online. This marked the complete deployment and application of the three core system groups: event results release, event management, and event support. In other words, the Asian Games achieved 100% cloud deployment of core systems, making cloud computing the digital foundation of large-scale sports events. The guide boards for each country's athletes have a 3D printed hollow fan shape, and 3D Twin Wia technology is used for the male and female actors who fly through the air in three dimensions.

Thirdly, the integration of diverse symbols shapes the ancient and modern cultural image. For example, the incorporation of internet symbols in the emblem design aligns with the characteristics of Hangzhou city, and the slogan “Heart to Heart, @future.” The torch is named “New Fire,” expressing the unity and integration of athletes from different countries, as well as the passing on of Chinese civilization. The torch features representative patterns from the Liangzhu culture and ancient Chinese oracle bone script, as well as symbols of the internet. The core graphic of the Asian Games, “Runze,” draws inspiration from Hangzhou's iconic local cultural element, silk, signifying both the significance of Hangzhou as the “City of Silk” and the “Maritime Silk Road.” The overall graphic resembles the poetic “Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains,” showcasing the interweaving of traditional landscape ink paintings, intelligent networks, and original colors, representing the collision and integration of the old and new. The closing ceremony performance, “Coexistence of Lotus and Laurel,” combines Chinese aesthetics with virtual reality technology, serving as a vivid practice to promote the building of an Asian community with a shared future. The selection of live music is interesting, with the Mid-Autumn Festival song “Wish People Lasted Long” and a DJ version of “Waiting for a Thousand Years”. The Hangzhou Asian Games exude a youthful and vibrant atmosphere, featuring both traditional sports events and emerging ones like e-sports and breakdancing. It offers a friendly environment for hosting traditional competitions while fully showcasing the vitality and confidence of China's new generation. The polite and dedicated volunteers and the on-site presenters represent the young blood of China. This is an important manifestation of youthfulness, vitality, and the flourishing vitality of the Asian sports world. China's image, ancient yet modern, confident yet composed, has come alive during the Asian Games.

3.2 Communication Channels: Resonance Immersed in Current Topics

3.2.1 Diversity and spontaneity of Communication Subjects

According to the theory of media rituals, media communication is no longer just the transmission of information but the construction of meaning. Therefore, the recipients of communication are not just passive recipients but active participants who share the experience, feel the sense of presence, and resonate in a ritualistic media communication event. The focal point of mass media is weakened, resulting in wider communication power and influence that stretches beyond defined time and space. In essence, the geographical and social restrictions are nullified for the audience which can participate remotely via diverse media, including TV programs, online streaming, social media and mobile app alerts. The focal point remains the ceremonial event which fosters "distance bridging with emotional resonance" for exchanging information in a detailed manner[6].

In the Hangzhou Asian Games, the mass media "casts a wide net," with established traditional media matrices such as Xinhua News Agency and CMG setting the main framework while new media accounts produce and release real-time news products on domestic and international social media platforms, realizing comprehensive pre-event promotion, real-time tracking during the event, and search for highlights to inspire emotions. They actively present Chinese topics to the world. Taking the CCTV News Channel as an example, every day, news programs such as "CCTV News" and "Sports News" and columns such as "Hear the World" and "Midday News" continuously release reports related to the Hangzhou Asian Games. Meanwhile, various new media platforms produce and broadcast online live programs such as "Highlights of Asian Games", "Asian Games Preview" and "Watching the Asian Games with the Greatest Critics" fully showcasing the charm and vitality of the Hangzhou Asian Games. They also invite guests and netizens to interact in live broadcasts. Well-known athletes, sports stars, and cultural celebrities are invited to join the reporting team to interpret the charm of the Asian Games from different perspectives. Netizens can participate in live interactions through platforms such as the "CCTV News" app, Weibo, and Douyin, providing immersive experiences for the audience.

User-generated content is emerging endlessly. Netizens creatively present topics of interest during the Asian Games through text, images, short and long videos on major social media platforms. This not only achieves remote "presence" but also serves as a source of "immersive" content production.

3.2.2 Intelligent and Immersive of Communication Technologies

Social integration is the fundamental function of media rituals, and performance is the basic practice of media rituals[9]. Communication is the process of naturally presenting symbol forms that integrate technology and concepts in human relationships[4]. Audiences now exert enormous control over incorporative practices, and these realities alter the nature of mediated rituals and mediated geographies[10]. The popularization of smart devices and the rise of social media have greatly enhanced the sense of presence. Traditional media and new media have built a matrix, integrating resources from various platforms and creating a three-dimensional communication matrix that connects domestic and foreign audiences. In the recent Hangzhou Asian Games, various new technologies were used to capture and broadcast the events, such as 5G technology for high-definition and smooth event broadcasting, 8K ultra-high-definition TV technology for immersive experiences, AI artificial intelligence data analysis and recognition,

and many other exciting technologies that truly enhance the audience's experience of intelligence and immersion.

3D technology was used to create a 3D arch bridge at the opening ceremony to achieve a seamless connection between ancient and modern times. The phrase “No matter the distance, tens of thousands of miles are still close neighbors” at that moment expressed the voice of China. The combination of naked-eye 3D visual effects and virtual images brought the magnificent scenery of China to the opening ceremony, blending cyber technology with Chinese aesthetics. Stereoscopic technology was used for large-scale performances and ignition ceremonies for the first time at the Hangzhou Asian Games.

AR interaction allowed the audience to participate in the opening ceremony by clicking on their phone screens continuously to assist the mascot in running and passing the torch. They could also choose nine lanterns to enjoy and release through AR, achieving the world's first large-scale interactive AR experience in an opening ceremony. Over 100 million people participated, truly realizing “mass participation, real-time interconnection.” During the closing ceremony, nearly 40,000 glowing points on the “numerical control lawn” created an immersive “most beautiful garden” experience.

Cloud broadcasting made the Hangzhou Asian Games the first Asia Games to be broadcasted in the cloud. Compared to traditional satellite broadcasting, cloud broadcasting surpasses bandwidth and offline device limitations, providing richer picture signals and editing methods. Even small and medium-sized broadcasting media without satellite reception equipment can also obtain programs in the cloud, achieving localized and personalized competition visuals.

Integration of the digital and the real. The Asian Games used a digital torchbearer to ignite the main torch, allowing both the audience at the opening ceremony and the audience watching through mass media to experience the visual feast. AR and AI technologies turned over 100 million digital torchbearers into giant digital figures, igniting the main torch along with human torchbearers, truly realizing “Asia united at this moment.”

“Bullet time” technology is an effects technology that allows spectators to view the competition from a special perspective through multi-angle shooting and post-production. This technology allows viewers to see every action, every detail, and even every drop of sweat from athletes. This technology provides viewers with unprecedented visual impact and viewing experience. At the Hangzhou Asian Games, bullet time technology was widely used in sports such as fencing and gymnastics. In these sports, where the pace is fast, displaying the details is especially important. Bullet time technology, through rapid switching of different angles and precise motion capture, allows viewers to watch the competition more clearly and comprehensively.

4 Conclusion

As Kerry stated in “The Cultural Transmission”, modern communication methods have greatly changed people's experiences, consciousness, interests, feelings, and perception of social relationships. Ritual communication focuses on the sharing of cultures and the communication of beliefs, providing us with a "space of identity"[11]. The Asian Games organizing process establishes a brand, creates cultural heritage, and continuously releases the Asian Games dividend before, during, and after the games. The Asian Games imprint becomes a brand of the

city, promoting the city's progress in the long run. Media rituals essentially manifest as a kind of performance, that is, the establishment of a complete system of symbols aimed at displaying and infecting, creating an “involvement” effect, fostering identification[9]. Media rituals mainly use emotions to mobilize people's emotions and control their behaviors, achieving the cohesion of a wide range of people to specific values.

At the national level, Chinese civilization and Eastern romance help Chinese people enhance their cultural identity and increase cultural confidence. The phrase “Chinese Taipei” and the song “A Family in Love” also ignite the fervent expectation for national reunification. Hosting large-scale sporting events can enhance patriotism and cohesion. Athletes' tenacious struggle and achievements on the field not only bring personal honor but also national honor, playing a role in rallying people's hearts and showcasing the country's prestige[12]. Based on the mechanism of group infection, the “simultaneous, remote, and shared” media rituals allow emotions to be consolidated through sharing, strengthening the emotional identification, sense of belonging, and sense of honor of the nation in the “ritualized” sports events.

At the international level, the influence of a major competition extends far beyond the day of the closing ceremony. The entire event and the media image presented by Chinese athletes are essential elements of sports communication and one of the most effective ways to promote national and Chinese public images[13]. Currently, cultural communication power is an important “soft power.” International major sports events are always closely related to politics, and the Oriental culture and grandeur presented in this Asian Games are one of China's best business cards on the world stage. The successful hosting of the event represents a powerful China, which means that future China has the capability and responsibility to play a greater role in global affairs and make greater contributions to all of humanity. Communicating sports events and spreading sports spirit are of great significance in building a credible, respectable, and lovable image of China. China should seize every opportunity of hosting world-class events, make use of sports media rituals, emphasize from the perspective of a community of shared future for mankind that human beings should jointly face global risks and challenges, and highlight China's responsibilities and contributions as a major country in solving global issues.

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