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Analyzing the "Chinese Elements" of Chinese Overseas from the Carnival of Cultures and Other Cultural Events

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Abstract: With increased cultural diversity, cultural display activities in various countries are increasing. The issue of how overseas Chinese display Chinese elements in these events has received widespread attention, but the kinds of Chinese elements they display and the ways and means of displaying them still need to be improved. This paper analyzes the Chinese elements displayed by Chinese cultural parties in cultural events, the Chinese culture represented by these elements, the reasons why overseas Chinese participate in these events, and the problems they may encounter. This paper analyzes the fact that people participate in the events for reasons of the need for cultural exchange, cultural attachment, cultural identity, and sense of belonging. In recent years, Chinese people have displayed Chinese elements with more depth and culture. In the process of participating in cultural activities, the problems of significant cultural differences and lack of experience may occur. Based on this, this paper puts forward the following suggestions: before displaying Chinese elements, it is necessary to understand cultural differences and enhance one's cross-cultural communication skills; it is possible to set up or join a cultural society in the local area to strengthen the organization and planning; and at the same time, it is necessary to increase the interactive parts in the activities to enhance interest and participation.

Keywords: Chinese elements, cultural communication, cultural events.

1. Introduction

On May 19, 2024, a Chinese costume parade from China called "Hello China" made its debut at The Carnival of Cultures in Berlin, with a photo of young people in Chinese costumes dancing to music on the cover of the German media Tagesschau. Founded in 1996, the Carnival of Cultures takes place during Pentecost (the seventh Sunday after Easter) and consists of a 3.5-kilometer-long multi-ethnic procession. The Festival was organized around four stages where various artistic groups presented music, dance, and theater performances from different regions of the world. They included "Barrio Latino", "Bazaar Oriental", "Eurasia", and "Farafina" [1].

This grand event, which celebrates multiculturalism and provides a platform for all cultures, has become one of the biggest festivals in Berlin, attracting 650,000 people to the 2024 event. The "Hello China" square consists of about 100 members, most of whom are Chinese students from the Chenyin Hanfu Club in Berlin. Some did not even live in Germany but came from Italy and Spain, reflecting the enthusiasm of overseas Chinese for such events. Taking The Carnival of Cultures as an example, this paper explores how Chinese elements have manifested themselves in overseas communication in

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recent years. Based on this, the paper analyzes in depth the difficulties that may be encountered in the process of Chinese cultural dissemination and puts forward suggestions for reference.

2. Chinese Elements Displayed at Events

In other cultural events similar to The Carnival of Cultures, Chinese people show a variety of Chinese elements to the outside world, usually focusing on Hanfu. However, more and more other elements have been spread in recent years, which can be categorized as follows.

2.1. The Most Representative Elements

The most representative content is always the basic elements presented, such as Chinese dress, dragon and lion dances, pandas, etc., which will appear in almost every cultural event.

Hanfu is the traditional dress of China's largest ethnic group, the Han Chinese, who make up more than 90% of the country's population, so Hanfu is almost a catch-all term for traditional Chinese clothing. In early cultural events, people came to the event in Tang costumes, a type of Hanfu that was designed and popularized in modern times. In the last few years, the revival of Hanfu has been in full swing within China, with young people designing, restoring, and making the forms of clothing that have been worn by ancient dynasties for thousands of years, traveling and taking photographs in Hanfu. International students bring many styles of Hanfu around the world to participate in different cultural events to show the world this new fashion that has become so popular in China [2]. Nowadays, Hanfu has become a necessary element for Chinese people in cultural events, and both actors and onlookers wear Hanfu to show their national aesthetics and traditional culture.

Among the Chinese festivals, the most familiar to foreigners is the Spring Festival. Chinese New Year is one of the most important traditional festivals for the Chinese people, and it is celebrated with great pomp and circumstance wherever there is a Chinese settlement during the lunar New Year. Dragon and lion dances are particularly eye-catching in overseas festivals and celebrations because of their bright colors, vivid and memorable images, and high technical difficulty in manipulation.

Pandas have always been a representative element of China and one of the most popular and fundamental elements in the process of cultural communication. The panda is an endangered species unique to China, and it has a cute, unique, relatable appearance; therefore, as China's national treasure, people can think of China when they see a panda. In cultural presentations and dissemination activities, members will use various panda elements--wearing panda pendants on their bodies, asking people to play panda dolls in the team--to emphasize their "Chineseness further."

2.2. Elements that Appear in Increasing Frequency in Recent Years

In recent years, as people's understanding of China deepens, curiosity about Chinese culture rises, and the cultural self-confidence of overseas Chinese increases, more elements such as Chinese song and dance art, myths and legends stories, Chinese etiquette, and ethnic minority dresses have appeared in cultural activities with more artistic and cultural connotations.

Street performances used to be a means that people used to make a living. However, in recent years, Chinese students have been playing Chinese musical instruments such as the guzheng and the erhu on the streets and dancing to the music, demonstrating Chinese music, Chinese dances, and martial arts, and posting them in short videos on social media, which have gained the attention and love of domestic and international audiences.

At the Carnival of Cultures in 2024, members of the Chinese party showed the audience the elements of the fish lanterns and the twelve floras. Fish lanterns are a product of the animal worship of the ancient Chinese people, prevalent in the coastal areas of lakes and seas. They are part of the

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rituals of fishermen praying for good weather and sacrificing to their ancestors during festivals such as the Lantern Festival, hoping that the "fish gods" in the sea and lakes will bless them.

The twelve floras are a manifestation of the Chinese plant cult. In the lunar calendar, each month has its representative flower and, therefore, has a corresponding flora. For example, the representative flower of January is the plum blossom, which has the qualities of strength and modesty; the apricot blossom flora of February symbolizes beauty and freedom; and the peony flora of April symbolizes wealth and honor. These beautiful expectations and wishes were given to the flowers and the god of flowers, and the image of the floras was gradually transformed from people's imagination into a historical figure with beautiful qualities [3]. The twelve flower deities in the Hello China parade are played by twelve girls who put on modified Hanfu (Chinese traditional dress) that matches the colors of the flowers represented each month and pull up their hair in elaborate and noble buns to play the twelve flower deities. During the parade, the twelve "Flower Gods" danced the steps of traditional Chinese dances, showing visitors the modern Chinese aesthetic image of the Flower Gods.

Regularly, foreigners learn about Chinese etiquette primarily by watching movies and TV shows. However, in a recent parade, actors dressed in Han Chinese costumes saluted roadside tourists in a close-up demonstration of Chinese etiquette, and tourists experienced real Chinese etiquette by mimicking the actors' movements and saluting them back.

Like the Han Chinese, the rest of China's 55 ethnic groups, also called minorities, have unique traditional costumes. With the revival of the Han Chinese dress movement, other ethnic minorities have also been influenced and have started to display their ethnic specialties on various platforms and events. Such displays better enable the outside world to understand the multi-ethnicity and cultural richness of the Chinese nation.

3. Reasons for Chinese to Spared Chinese Culture in Culture Activities

3.1. The Need for Cultural Exchange

The Carnival of Cultures in Germany and the New Year's celebrations in the United Kingdom are officially organized cultural exchange platforms with a vital purpose, all of which are aimed at demonstrating cultural diversity and the inclusiveness of their own countries, making them the most suitable occasions for the dissemination of culture. In such celebrations, multiple cultures are displayed on an equal footing, and the audience and performers are in an atmosphere of cultural exchange and fusion. Chinese culture should also be displayed and spread at such events. Efforts should be made to enrich the variety and connotation of the content and elements on display and endeavor to break down stereotypes. When it comes to Chinese songs, the melody in everyone's mind is not only stuck in "Jasmine Flower", and the understanding of Chinese festivals has gone from knowing only the Spring Festival to recognizing the Dragon Boat Festival and the Mid-Autumn Festival. The widespread spread of the dragon dance has made it possible to differentiate the name of the Loong from the dragon and no longer call it the Chinese Dragon. Increasing cultural exchanges, promoting mutual understanding between cultures, and fostering friendships between various cultural groups.

3.2. Cultural Attachment

Before the concept of "cultural attachment" was formally proposed, it was regarded as a sub-dimension of cultural identity and cultural attachment was described as an individual's pride in the history, flag, etc., of the cultural group to which he belongs [4]. Subsequently, the definition of cultural attachment was first explicitly proposed based on attachment theory, and some scholars have argued that cultural attachment is the emotional connection that an individual establishes with the culture to which he or she belongs [5]. International students in Germany are proud of China's history

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and culture and want to show their beauty and uniqueness to German and even world audiences, so they set up the Chenyin Hanfu Club. The process of cultural attachment involves intra-group interaction and cooperation, which is a relational process [6]. In the Hanfu club, members cooperate, organize and plan Hanfu shows such as the Mid-Autumn Festival Gala and the Chinese New Year Gala within the German Chinese community, and deepen the emotional connection between the groups in these activities, which is not only the cultural attachment of Chinese students to Chinese culture, but also the cultural attachment among the German Chinese community.

3.3. Cultural Identity and Sense of Belonging

Fossil identity is "a decisive factor in the construction of a particular social identity", and "it is not possible to adequately construct modern fuming, or the people in those fuming, without an understanding of the major differences and striking similarities between the different fuming [7]. This helps people to understand different ethnic, racial, and linguistic groups, communities, and minorities and to promote their uniqueness and specificity in today's globalized societies and organizations [8]. Overseas Chinese can be regarded as a group of people with a common cultural background who share the same Chinese cultural background. Therefore, their identification with Chinese culture is the decisive factor in setting up the establishment of Hanfu societies and promoting Chinese culture. When people arrive in unfamiliar countries to study and live and face a new environment of culture shock and integration of cultures from all over the world, it becomes a reflection of their "sense of belonging" and "sense of security" to find a group with similar language, behavioral habits, and cultural background. Through the display of Chinese culture in various activities, they can also make local Chinese people have the same sense of belonging.

4. Difficulties and Challenges in Cultural Events

4.1. Cultural Differences

Based on the profoundness of Chinese culture and the incomplete knowledge of foreign friends about China, Chinese elements may be singularly understood as a particular element or symbol in foreign countries. For example, when discussing Chinese culture, people often think of the Chinese knot. How exactly to introduce Chinese elements to others in a cross-cultural environment is one of the urgent problems to be solved. In the cultural activities of Chinese New Year, many people only know that the Spring Festival is the Chinese New Year. However, they do not know that there are different zodiac signs every year, and they need to learn the connection between zodiac signs and the New Year. Since differences in cultural backgrounds are objective, certain Chinese elements have their unique meanings or metaphors in China, but losing the Chinese context and cultural environment in China makes it easier for people from other cultures to understand these meanings. For example, "fish" and "yu" (surplus) are homophones in China, so fish represents abundance and harvest. So, the fish element has a lot of applications in Chinese culture. However, in the eyes of people who do not understand the cultural background of fish, the fish in clothing patterns and decorative hangings will appear to be superficial. The Chinese people have always been subtle and introverted in their way of thinking, so the expression of Chinese art is not easy to be understood directly. Clothes with auspicious clouds, flowing clouds, grapes, flowers, birds, etc., are different from the real thing, and more abstract as if the ancients had given them a divine nature, creating another imaginary mythological world. It is relatively difficult to understand these unfamiliar elements, which are very different from those in the imagination.

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4.2. Lack of Experience to Draw on

The Chinese team appeared for the first time in many cultural exchange activities. There is not much experience for the actors to refer to in the selection of elements. Moreover, most of the participants are foreign students from China who need to learn more about the language and cultural background of the place where the activity takes place—coupled with the differences between the East and the West in terms of ways of thinking and artistic aesthetics, what kind of expression is more suitable for displaying the selected cultural elements? How to make people from different cultural environments appreciate the beauty of Eastern culture? These are the questions that participants need to think about. There is no fixed, mature model for reference for Chinese cultural output in foreign cultural activities, and actors always find that their performances do not match their expectations.

5. Suggestions

5.1. Improve Intercultural Communication Skills

Cultural communication activities in foreign countries are also cross-cultural, so they require certain cross-cultural communication skills, and research has proved that managers who follow culturally sensitive communication strategies can accomplish more [9]. To improve cross-cultural skills, firstly, volunteers need to understand and learn Chinese culture in depth, and after accurately comprehending the Chinese elements to be communicated, they will be in a better position to make comprehensible output to the outside world; secondly, they need to understand the customs and cultures of the place where the activity takes place and learn about the other side's taboos, social norms, and different ways of communicating, to recognize the cultural differences.

In cross-cultural communication, it is important to focus on communication and listening, understand the feelings of the other party, avoid cultural misunderstanding, learn to adjust communication styles according to different cultural backgrounds, and both parties should respect each other's culture. On this basis, people should try their best to learn the language of the other party and improve their communication level. In addition, it is necessary to focus on innovative forms of Chinese cultural communication, enhance cultural confidence, increase the frequency of communication, and use a combination of online and offline ways to expand the influence and spread the depth of cultural connotation.

5.2. Improving Interactivity

Organizers can design some interactive sessions in advance, and during the event, proper interaction will make the audience more engaged [10]. In a parade, actors can salute each other with tourists and teach them the gestures and body postures of Chinese etiquette. In contrast, small game segments can be added to displays that have a fixed location. For example, if the Chinese zodiac culture is introduced at a New Year's event, simply introducing the twelve Chinese zodiac signs with their corresponding years will be somewhat unattractive, but allowing people to project their own zodiac signs according to the year of their birth will increase the participation. At the same time, small gifts with significant Chinese characteristics are also very attractive. Small gifts such as Chinese knots, panda decorations, and calligraphy folding fans are all very suitable to be given to participants as small gifts for participation and interaction.

5.3. Establishing an Organization

Volunteers interested in participating in such cultural activities can form an organization to plan and negotiate their participation in similar cultural activities. Some countries and regions already have

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some Hanfu clubs where members rehearse programs and participate in activities together. Based on this, these clubs should expand into more cultural areas so that people who are interested in other Chinese elements besides Hanfu, regardless of nationality, can join the clubs. The clubs should conduct internal training for cross-cultural communication skills, and they can also hold regular lectures on Chinese culture. Professionals should be invited to talk about culture-related knowledge, and members should understand Chinese elements better to spread them abroad. Club organizations can also look for commercial sponsorships to reduce their financial pressure.

6. Conclusion

By introducing and analyzing the Chinese elements displayed by the Chinese side in various cultural festivals, this paper shows that the Chinese elements displayed by overseas Chinese in the events are no longer limited to the well-known iconic elements such as Chinese clothes, Chinese characters, and Chinese knots, but more intangible cultural heritage, such as fish lanterns, have been brought to the stage. From the display of single elements to the demonstration of cultural heritage, such as plant worship and animal worship, the attitude towards the outside world has gone through the process of seeking recognition to confidently demonstrating. The range of activities in which the Chinese participate has also expanded from festivals within the Chinese community to the stage of festivals for world cultural exchange. When participating in these activities, volunteers have developed from spontaneous, individual participation to joint participation by associations and have even sought sponsorship and support from relevant cultural organizations in China. The Hello China Square performance has reached a cooperation with the Hanyangling Museum, which has provided guidance on etiquette and other aspects and has also helped the museum to expand its popularity overseas, so these collaborations are necessary. In terms of interactivity, compared with the previous simple parades and displays, the international students prepared a lot of small gifts, such as pom-poms and Chinese knots, to give to the audience on both sides of the street, which was highly evaluated.

To summarize, when volunteers display Chinese elements overseas, they need to keep abreast of the times, think about the elements that can be displayed in different ways, and enrich the diversity of display elements. Increase interactivity in the display and try to improve cross-cultural communication skills to leave a deep impression on tourists. It is also necessary to actively seek cooperation and a win-win situation.

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