

The Homogenization and Breakthrough of Weifang Kite Cultural Tourism from the Perspective of Transmedia Storytelling

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Abstract. With the deep integration of culture and tourism industries, Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) has turned into a core resource for local cultural communication and industrial growth. As a national-level ICH item, Weifang Kite has realized wide-ranging communication via short videos, festivals, cultural and creative goods, and offline exhibitions, and has gradually built a complete cross-media communication system. Nevertheless, homogenization problems appear in its practical development, covering narrative themes, visual expressions and experience modes. Based on transmedia storytelling theory and practical cases, this paper explores the current situation and dilemmas of Weifang Kite cultural tourism communication. It points out that such homogenization is caused by the joint effect of capital logic, inadequate craft innovation and platform communication mechanisms. Thus, this paper puts forward optimized paths from narrative content, media collaboration, stakeholder participation and industrial development, reconstructs a multi-level cultural narrative space while retaining the core culture, aiming for greater clarity and long-term viability in Weifang Kite cultural tourism.

Keywords: transmedia storytelling, Weifang Kite, homogenization, integration of cultural tourism and communication, activation of Intangible Cultural Heritage

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the deep integration of culture and tourism industries, Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) has broken free from its traditional protection scope and stepped into the wider fields of public consumption and communication. Known as the "World Kite Capital", Weifang owns a kite-making tradition of more than 2,000 years. The city takes advantage of the annual Weifang International Kite Festival to gain global visibility, acting as an important link for local culture to communicate with the outside world. Driven by the fast development of digital media, the ways to promote Weifang Kite have also changed greatly. Its communication has expanded from traditional festivals and exhibitions to short video platforms, travel vlogs, immersive museum exhibitions and various cultural and creative products. Such a development has formed a diversified and multi-platform communication network, which is a typical practice of transmedia communication.

However, with the expansion of communication, some problems have become more and more obvious. Both online content and offline experiences show obvious similarity: cultural and creative products mostly use a small number of fixed patterns; narrative content mainly focuses on topics like "artisan spirit" and "ICH inheritance"; and tourists can only watch or take part in simple hands-on activities. Behind the lively communication scene, there is serious content repetition and single expression. As a result, Weifang Kite is widely seen but hard to leave a deep impression. As Baudrillard (1970) pointed out, "the logic of the commodity has been generalized, and now governs not only labor processes and material products, but the entirety of culture, sexuality, interpersonal relationships, and individual fantasies and impulses" [1]. To a certain extent, this phenomenon is connected with the consumption trend of cultural symbols.

It should be emphasized that this problem is not exclusive to Weifang Kite, but a common difficulty for most ICH-related cultural tourism projects. Based on this, this paper studies the communication of Weifang Kite cultural tourism from the perspective of transmedia storytelling. It explores three core questions: first, how is communication content formed on different media? Second, what leads to the homogenization of such content? Third, what effective optimization paths can be put forward? This analysis aims to clarify the communication strategies of Weifang Kite and provide references for the cultural tourism development of other similar ICH projects.

2. Literature review

In recent years, there has been a growing body of academic research, both domestically and internationally, on the integration of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) with cultural tourism. Existing studies generally agree that ICH, once integrated into the tourism system, is prone to varying degrees of homogenization. This issue is first evident in the realm of cultural and creative products, where a large number of designs merely appropriate traditional symbols superficially, resulting in product uniformity and a lack of innovative expression based on the cultural core [2]. At the level of tourism development, many ICH projects are simplified into monolithic sightseeing attractions or commodities, leading to increasingly superficial tourist experiences [3]. Scholars point out that the root cause lies in the prevailing development models which often stop at the surface-level extraction and commercial utilization of cultural symbols, failing to delve into the intrinsic spiritual value and the complete narrative system of ICH [4]. Such shallow development not only weakens the unique charm of traditional culture but also damages the long-term competitive capacity of the cultural tourism industry [5].

To interpret this problem, Long Diyong's "spatial narrative" theory offers a valuable analytical angle. He holds that mature cultural practices should form a three-dimensional and multi-level "narrative space". In essence, homogenization is the course where this complete cultural space is squeezed and simplified into a single cultural consumption symbol or scene [6]. For this reason, rebuilding and expanding this narrowed narrative space has turned into a key research focus in recent studies.

On this basis, transmedia storytelling theory has been applied to relevant research fields. Jenkins notes that transmedia storytelling centers on a unified story world, builds connected and complementary narratives across different media platforms, and pays close attention to audience participation and creative input [7]. Current studies prove that multi-platform cooperation can relieve content homogeneity to a certain degree. For example, creating a distinctive cultural tourism IP, via integrated media layout, complete story world construction and fan community management, can build unique advantages to fight against homogeneous competition [8]. The short video communication of Guizhou Village Super League is a successful case, which integrates local

participants, emotional content and cross-media channels to realize resonant and wide-ranging communication [9]. In addition, some studies explore technical applications like VR, AR and digital museums to build immersive narrative scenes, so as to deepen users' experience and enhance their cultural identity [10].

For Weifang Kite, available studies mainly concentrate on communication paths, cultural and creative product design and festival events, and stress the use of integrated media to boost communication effects and integrate the heritage into daily life [11]. However, these studies are relatively fragmented and lack systematic analysis on the specific forms and causes of homogenization in Weifang Kite's multi-media communication. Thus, it is essential to re-examine the communication of Weifang Kite cultural tourism from a holistic transmedia storytelling perspective on the basis of previous research.

3. Analysis and findings

3.1. The transmedia communication landscape of Weifang Kite cultural tourism

Currently, the dissemination of the Weifang Kite primarily focuses on four categories of media: short video platforms, offline scenic area exhibitions and performances, cultural and creative products, as well as film/television works and emerging media. Overall, this has formed an "online traffic attraction + offline experience" transmedia communication system. Different media platforms have their own emphases and are gradually extending into emerging forms such as games and micro-dramas. However, in practice, the various media largely operate in parallel rather than achieving genuine content synergy.

Short video platforms serve as the most dynamic front for the current communication of Weifang Kite, and Douyin, Kuaishou and Xiaohongshu have gradually formed their own unique content styles. On Douyin, the official account "@CultureTourismWeifang" mainly displays kite festival performances and urban landscapes, and its most popular single video has surpassed 5 million views. Accounts of national and provincial-level ICH inheritors including "@ZhangXiaodong" and "@GuoHongli" mostly share the kite-making process, focusing on crafting dragon-head centipede kites and explaining traditional techniques. Travel vlogger "@FangYe"'s "Weifang Kite Check-in" series, with natural shooting and a life-documentary tone, is a typical form of light communication. Kuaishou is dominated by grassroots creators; local inheritor accounts like "@WeifangKiteYangHongwei" often present real flying scenes and craft tutorials, with a more down-to-earth daily style. Xiaohongshu focuses on "travel guides + photo check-ins". Tags such as "#KiteCapitalDiary" mainly cover visit guides to the Weifang Kite Museum, making the platform an important reference for tourists.

Offline scenic area exhibitions and performances act as key carriers for experiencing kite culture. Weifang World Kite Museum displays over 1,000 traditional and modern kite works, mainly through wall hangings and glass cabinets, supplemented by partial XR digital experience zones. Hanting Yangjiabu Folk Art Grand View Garden provides live heritage displays, including on-site kite-making demonstrations and craft restoration by inheritors. World Kite Park has launched the large-scale immersive live show Dream Rising in Weifang, trying to present kite culture via performing arts. The Weifang International Kite Festival, as the annual core event, has been the most representative communication node since 1984. The 43rd Kite Festival in 2026, themed "Gallop Across Mountains and Seas, Striving for a Trillion-Yuan City", held the World Kite Championships, public kite-flying and international exchanges, attracting wide attention. Overall, offline scenes focus on viewing and participation, but the depth of experience is uneven.

Films, TV works and emerging media have provided more narrative space for kite culture to a certain extent. The CCTV documentary series *China in Intangible Cultural Heritage* produced a special episode on Weifang kite making and the short film *Kites Dancing in the Sky*, recording the craft inheritance lineage through documentary shots. Weifang kite elements have also been integrated into TV dramas as cultural symbols in plots. Meanwhile, Weifang Kite has stepped into game fields, cooperating with games to launch kite-themed cosmetic items and integrate traditional patterns into virtual scenes. Besides, Weifang's cultural tourism sector has released micro-dramas and derivatives like kite-themed board games and playing cards, reaching young audiences in a more accessible way. These attempts have expanded communication boundaries, but they still stay at the exploratory stage.

3.2. Manifestations of homogenization

3.2.1. Consolidation of narrative themes, insufficient exploration of cultural connotation

Nowadays, the promotion of Weifang Kite mostly centers on themes like craftspeople's dedication and ICH inheritance, but fails to dig into its profound cultural connotations. Both short videos and documentaries repeatedly show similar scenes, such as kite-making by craftspeople and skill-learning by young inheritors, which may form a rigid expression model gradually. Meanwhile, systematic introductions to the local historical background, craft differences among various schools and family stories of typical inheritors are quite scarce. Thus, despite the seemingly rich communication, the narrative is quite monotonous, leaving audiences unable to gain a comprehensive and delicate cognition of Weifang Kite culture.

3.2.2. Stylized visual symbols, lack of differential expression

In terms of visual promotion, a group of stereotyped presentation modes has taken shape, featured by repeated use of images and design elements. The swallow-shaped kite is usually regarded as the symbol of Weifang Kite, and the display ways of dragon-head centipede kites also lack diversity (see Figure 1). Common scenes such as craftspeople making kites, groups flying kites in squares, and giant kites flying in the blue sky frequently appear in short videos and posters, and these visuals are repeated on different platforms. Most check-in photos on Xiaohongshu are also taken at fixed spots such as the "kite wall" in museums. Long-term exposure to such contents easily causes audience aesthetic fatigue. Although Weifang Kite itself is rich in shapes, patterns and structures, such diversity is not fully shown in its communication, making it less distinguishable from kites in other regions.



(a) Swallow-shaped kite



(b) Dragon-head centipede kite

Figure 1. Typical visual forms of the Weifang Kite

3.2.3. Traditional and singular display forms, lack of scenario-based design

In offline spatial display, Weifang Kite still adopts static exhibitions and basic skill demonstrations as the main forms, keeping a traditional presentation mode. At present, Weifang World Kite Museum mainly exhibits collections through wall hangings and glass cabinets, with halls divided by kite types and historical stages. The spatial design fails to directly show the link between kites and the traditional folk life of ancient Weifang, so visitors can only view exhibits instead of gaining immersive situational experience. Likewise, ICH venues like Yangjiabu have set up live skill shows, but the whole experience is still based on observation without complete scene restoration, which makes it hard for tourists to form deep memories and emotional bonds.

3.2.4. Superficial interaction methods, lack of co-creation and deep experience

Public participation in Weifang Kite activities is relatively superficial both online and offline. Offline hands-on projects mostly offer simple coloring for pre-made kites, and tourists rarely take part in core crafts such as frame binding, paper sticking and painting. The interactive links of kite festivals stay at basic levels like free flying, lacking systematic co-creation designs. Online communication is dominated by one-way content release, and audiences only act as viewers and likers with few chances for creative participation or in-depth discussion. Despite comment and sharing functions, profound interactions around kite culture are rare, which weakens audiences' lasting interest and deep cultural recognition.

3.3. Mechanisms of homogenization formation

3.3.1. The logic of cultural tourism capital

Driven by profit-seeking goals, capital invested in cultural tourism tends to pick low-cost, reproducible and easily commercialized development and communication modes. This trend restricts the full display of the unique local characteristics of Weifang Kite to a certain extent. In the development of cultural and creative products, investors often directly use classic patterns such as swallow kites and centipede kites, turning them into daily goods like key rings and fridge magnets. Although these products have good market sales, they rarely transform the core skills of kite-making including binding, pasting, painting and flying, and fail to integrate deeply with local folk customs. The experience design in scenic spots generally uses the common mode of static exhibitions plus simple hands-on activities, which cannot restore the real scenes of traditional markets in ancient Weifang to create distinctive experiences.

In content creation, creators prefer to make standardized content that adapts to platform algorithms for better communication effects. They spend little energy exploring the historical background, complex craft details and local stories related to Weifang Kite. This situation further makes the narrative content single and convergent, losing the diversity of cultural expression.

3.3.2. Bottlenecks in craft innovation

The inheritance of Weifang Kite skills is facing a severe problem of aging practitioners. At present, there are two national-level ICH inheritors of Weifang Kite-making techniques, namely Zhang Xiaodong and Yang Hongwei. Zhang Xiaodong is 77 years old, and the average age of kite-making ICH inheritors at or above the municipal level in Weifang is over 60. Although the number of young inheritors has risen in some regions, young talents are still in short supply across the industry. Post-

90s inheritors of the new generation such as Guo Jiawei, the son of inheritor Guo Hongli, are extremely rare. Relevant platform data also proves this situation. According to the 2025 Intangible Cultural Heritage Data Report released by Douyin, the number of post-00s creators releasing ICH-related videos rose by 95% year on year, but the percentage of post-00s creators focusing on kite-making is much lower than the average level of all ICH fields. Most senior craftspeople only focus on passing on traditional skills, and lack the motivation to innovate patterns, shapes and modern life integration. A sound industry atmosphere that supports innovation has not been formed yet.

Meanwhile, the communication of Weifang Kite is mainly organized by cultural tourism authorities, commercial teams and self-media operators. These creators usually have a partial understanding of kite culture, knowing little about the skill differences among different schools and rarely digging into the personal experiences and family stories of inheritors. In actual content production, they prefer to choose visual symbols that can easily attract traffic, such as the making process and flying scenes, instead of telling in-depth stories such as skill innovation, international exchanges, pattern implications and the connection with woodblock New Year paintings. As a result, the spread content stays on the surface of symbols, without enough cultural depth and narrative richness.

3.3.3. Reinforcement by platform algorithms

The algorithm rules of short video platforms affect the direction of content creation and worsen the convergence of expressions to some degree. Platforms including Douyin and Kuaishou favor short content with fast rhythm and strong visual impact, and give more exposure to contents like kite flying and craftspeople's skills. In this environment, creators follow popular templates such as slow-motion shots of craft making to gain traffic. In the same way, travel guides on Xiaohongshu have formed fixed styles in picture-text arrangement, filters and copywriting. This algorithm-led creation mode pushes creators into a closed loop of following trends, getting traffic and continuing to follow trends, which finally produces a large amount of highly homogeneous communication content.

3.3.4. Constraints of policy and brand discourse

The official promotion of Weifang's city image always centers on the unified theme of the World Kite Capital, using a grand and positive narrative tone. This system helps build the city's brand, but also makes the communication content focus on macro perspectives such as festival grandeur and development achievements. It ignores diversified contents including the personal stories of inheritors, the skill features of small-scale schools and the emotional ties between ordinary citizens and kites. Influenced by this guidance, grassroots creators also tend to use similar narrative ways, making the overall content more unified and less distinctive.

4. Discussion: pathways for breakthrough

4.1. Differentiation of narrative themes

To break the homogenization of narrative themes, the key step is to build a more layered story world for Weifang Kite. Concretely, it requires a systematic sorting of the inheritance context of its craftsmanship, the artistic features of different genres, and the family stories behind representative inheritors. These contents can be shaped into independent but interrelated narrative modules, laying a solid foundation for the following cross-media communication. Meanwhile, it is essential to further clarify the connection between Weifang Kite and other local intangible cultural heritages,

such as Yangjiabu woodblock New Year paintings and paper-cutting, by combining the origin of patterns, the relevance of techniques and the common folk custom foundation.

From an overall perspective, this approach is not simply about supplementing contents. Instead, it reorganizes the scattered cultural expressions and gradually integrates them into the overall narrative system of local regional culture, which can effectively improve the cultural depth and attraction of Weifang Kite communication to a certain extent.

4.2. Transmedia collaborative narrative system

To realize a comprehensive breakthrough, it is also necessary to further define the functional relationship of different media platforms on the existing basis. Under the guidance of the core ideas of transmedia storytelling [7], we can try to build a communication system that realizes efficient coordination between online and offline. In this system, different media take on differentiated roles and complement each other, so as to jointly enrich and improve the story world of Weifang Kite. For example, short videos are suitable for showing interesting details of the production process to attract public attention. Documentaries and feature films can sort out the historical context and technical logic of kite craftsmanship, helping the audience form a complete cognition and consolidate the story core of the whole narrative system. In addition, games, micro-dramas and other forms can enhance audience participation through plots and interactive designs.

For offline scenes, we can properly adjust the existing exhibition modes to change passive viewing into active experience and guide the audience to integrate into participatory culture [12]. This is essentially the practical application of Long Diyong's meta-representational thinking in spatial design [6]. The goal is to make physical space break through the single display function and become a three-dimensional, experiential and interactive narrative carrier. Specifically, exhibition venues should shift from static display to scene restoration based on historical reality. AR and other digital technologies can be used to turn professional knowledge into an interactive exploration process. Handmade experience activities should also be upgraded from simple operation to in-depth participation in core craftsmanship. For the Weifang International Kite Festival, it is necessary to transform it into a cultural event with full public participation. Through the closed loop of online idea collection, offline collaborative production and on-site collective flying, the festival can become a large-scale activity that carries collective cultural memory. Finally, online interaction and offline immersion are connected to upgrade transmedia storytelling from a communication strategy to a deep cultural experience mode.

4.3. Diversification of communication agents

The cognitive gap among communication subjects is an important reason for the weakening of Weifang Kite's narrative charm. The breakthrough path is to gradually highlight the leading role of ICH inheritors and build a diversified communication system of "inheritors + professional creators + enthusiasts". First of all, ICH inheritors should be the core narrators. They are not only the inheritors of skills but also the direct communicators of cultural connotations, and their expressions are more real and vivid than second-hand narration. Secondly, we can gather local creators who love kite culture and have a deep understanding of regional culture, and let them transform professional cultural content into forms suitable for communication on different platforms, ensuring the cultural depth and communication effect of contents. At the same time, Weifang cultural tourism departments can build communication bridges among inheritors, creators and the public by holding

design competitions, issuing innovation subsidies and building exchange platforms, so as to form a professional and life-oriented kite culture communication model.

4.4. Synergy between cultural value and industrial development

The sustainable development of Weifang Kite cultural tourism needs to balance cultural value and industrial value. In this process, the idea of "creative transformation and innovative development" can be used as a guideline to avoid excessive commercialization that leads to the shallowness of cultural expression [13]. The government should focus on top-level design, clarify the scope of cultural protection and provide targeted support to consolidate the foundation of cultural inheritance. The market should develop the industry on the premise of respecting the authenticity of kite culture. The industrial form should be gradually upgraded from simple sightseeing to experience-oriented tourism. We should build a product system that takes into account public demand and cultural value, and make commercial activities an important carrier of cultural communication.

On this basis, a benign development cycle can be formed: unique cultural content enhances the industrial competitiveness of Weifang Kite, and market benefits in turn feed back to the protection, research and inheritance of kite culture, promoting the long-term and stable development of Weifang Kite cultural tourism. Compared to merely pursuing expansion in scale, this more sound development approach may be more conducive to the sustainable development of the Weifang Kite in the current environment.

5. Conclusion

The inheritance and dissemination of Weifang Kite are closely linked to both the continuation of a traditional handicraft and the preservation of a cultural form that is deeply rooted in regional soil and daily life. In an era with continuous media iteration and communication innovation, a core question is worth exploring persistently: how can this "paper hawk" inherited from history fly farther in the new communication pattern, reach a wider audience, and still maintain its irreplaceable connection with the land, craftspeople and collective cultural memories?

This paper makes a preliminary summary of practical observations, trying to clarify the communication modes of Weifang Kite and provide a reference for the development of similar intangible cultural heritage projects. This study also has certain limitations. The analysis of audience acceptance mainly adopts qualitative methods, and more detailed data can be added in future research. Besides, the improvement paths proposed in this paper are mainly theoretical and conceptual, and their actual effects need to be tested and verified through specific practices.

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