Proceeding of ICGPSH 2025 Symposium: International Relations and Global Governance
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.BO24371

Cross-Cultural Communication Strategies: A Case Study of the Documentary Aerial China

Tianhui Gao

Communication University of China, Beijing, China
13105382731@163.com

Abstract. This paper aims to explore the achievements and impact of the documentary Aerial China in terms of cross-cultural communication strategies. By closely examining the documentary's international expression, audience positioning, and cultural connotations, the study analyzes how it successfully conveys Chinese values and cultural essence within a global context, thereby enhancing China's national image. Moreover, this paper discusses the implications of Aerial China for cross-cultural communication and proposes suggestions for the future development of Chinese documentaries. It argues that Chinese documentaries should continue to strengthen international awareness, improve production quality and innovation capacity, enhance cross-cultural communication capabilities, and actively engage in cooperation and exchange to respond to the challenges and opportunities brought about by globalization.

Keywords: Aerial China, cross-cultural communication, global context, development of Chinese documentaries

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of China's economy and the rise of its international status, the country's international communication system has undergone a transformation from nonexistence to existence, and from weakness to strength. In the early days of China's reform and opening-up, external communication strategies primarily focused on introducing the nation's political system and cultural traditions to the world. Entering the 21st century, especially after joining the World Trade Organization, China's external communication has become increasingly diversified, emphasizing the construction of an open, inclusive, and progressive national image on the global stage[1].

Globalization has brought unprecedented opportunities as well as challenges to China's international communication. On one hand, globalization has made information dissemination faster and more widespread, providing a platform for China to showcase its development achievements and cultural charm. On the other hand, globalization has also intensified the transnational flow of information, and the influence of foreign cultures and information on China has grown significantly. This necessitates a greater sensitivity to cultural differences and more deliberate content curation in China's international communication efforts.

Aerial China is a large-scale aerial documentary produced by China Central Television (CCTV). Filmed from an aerial perspective, it presents the magnificence of China's landscapes, the richness

© 2026 The Authors. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.BO24371

of its culture, and the vitality of its rapid development. Since its premiere in 2017, the documentary has released three seasons, each covering multiple regions across China—from the icy landscapes of the north to the tropical rainforests of the south, from bustling eastern metropolises to the vast grasslands of the west. Each episode vividly portrays the grandeur of China through stunning visuals and engaging narration.

The influence of Aerial China is considerable. It has achieved high viewership ratings and critical acclaim domestically, while also garnering widespread attention and praise internationally. Through this documentary, global audiences have been offered a glimpse into China's historical culture and modern development, allowing them to experience the country's beauty and dynamism. The documentary has also advanced international collaboration, bringing Chinese documentaries to the global stage and further enhancing China's image and influence in international communication.

The success of Aerial China lies not only in its exquisite visuals and vivid storytelling, but also in its profound cultural implications and value orientation. The documentary emphasizes the concept of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, showcasing China's efforts and achievements in building an ecological civilization. At the same time, it highlights the enterprising spirit and innovative vitality of the Chinese people, conveying that China's development is not only an economic rise, but also a cultural continuation and innovation.

Therefore, Aerial China is not only a successful documentary but also a model of cross-cultural communication. By analyzing the cross-cultural communication strategies and national image construction reflected in Aerial China, we can gain deeper insight into China's international communication strategies and challenges, providing valuable lessons and inspiration for future global communication efforts[2].

2. Cross-cultural communication strategies in aerial China

2.1. Overview of cross-cultural communication theory

On the stage of international relations, nations—as key actors—must pay special attention to the practices and strategies of cross-cultural communication. From a national perspective, cross-cultural communication refers to the exchange and interaction of information, values, and social customs among countries with different cultural backgrounds. This kind of communication goes beyond the trade of cultural products and services; it also concerns the shaping and safeguarding of national image, diplomatic policy, and international status. Through diplomatic channels, media organizations, and cultural exchange programs, countries transmit their political stances, economic achievements, cultural traditions, and social customs to the international community. The goal is to foster understanding and recognition from other nations and to lay a foundation for international cooperation and development[3].

The core objective of national cross-cultural communication is to enhance a country's soft power—strengthening its comprehensive national strength through cultural appeal and influence. By engaging in cross-cultural communication, a country can showcase its unique cultural charm, social progress, and the character of its people, thereby building a positive national image and increasing its international discourse power and influence.

Cross-cultural communication is characterized by cultural differences and interactivity. Due to the diversity in cultural backgrounds, social systems, and development stages among nations, such communication inevitably faces challenges posed by cultural differences. Therefore, the communication process must fully respect and understand foreign cultures, avoiding cultural centralism and stereotypes. Moreover, cross-cultural communication is inherently a two-way

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.BO24371

interactive process. It is crucial to focus on audience feedback and adapt accordingly to ensure effective information transfer and meaningful cultural exchange.

In short, cross-cultural communication is a vital component of international relations. It plays an essential role in enhancing national soft power, constructing a positive national image, and promoting international cooperation and development. As globalization deepens, countries must devote greater attention to the practice and strategic research of cross-cultural communication to navigate an increasingly complex global environment.

2.2. The narrative strategy of aerial China: A geography-centered narrative structure

Aerial China employs a multifaceted narrative strategy, which is primarily reflected in the following aspects:

2.2.1. Geographically anchored narrative structure

The documentary is structured around geographical regions, using aerial perspectives to display the natural landscapes, historical heritage, and modern development of different parts of China. Each episode focuses on a specific region, weaving a coherent narrative thread from sky to ground and from past to present, thereby forming a complete storytelling arc rooted in spatial geography.

2.2.2. Non-linear narrative technique

Unlike traditional linear storytelling, Aerial China adopts a non-linear approach. It integrates aerial footage, ground-level photography, and historical archives to construct a multi-dimensional, multi-temporal narrative. This technique allows viewers to perceive Chinese geography, history, and culture from various angles and depths[4].

2.2.3. Emotive storytelling strategy

The documentary emphasizes emotional resonance by showcasing majestic natural scenery, rich cultural heritage, and the vitality of modern development. Through these visual cues, the documentary evokes emotional connections with the audience. Additionally, by telling the stories of ordinary people, it brings to life the human aspect of each location and fosters a sense of authenticity and empathy.

2.2.4. Internationalized narrative style

The documentary's narrative language strikes a balance between cultural specificity and global accessibility. By collaborating with international production teams, Aerial China adopts globally recognizable narrative methods and stylistic conventions. This approach makes the documentary more relatable and comprehensible to international audiences.

Through these narrative strategies, Aerial China effectively presents the diverse natural landscapes, cultural traditions, and modern advancements of China. It constructs an image of China that is authentic, beautiful, and full of vitality, offering valuable insights and reference points for cross-cultural communication[5].

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.BO24371

2.3. The audiovisual language of aerial China: Use of aerial filming and visual impact

As a large-scale aerial documentary, Aerial China exhibits a unique and expressive audiovisual language, which contributes significantly to its cross-cultural appeal.

2.3.1. Grand visual perspective

Aerial photography inherently offers expansive visual perspectives, allowing Aerial China to present China's natural and human landscapes from a macro viewpoint. Whether it is vast grasslands, towering mountains, bustling metropolises, or tranquil rural scenes, the overhead lens captures and magnifies their grandeur and beauty.

2.3.2. Exquisite visual composition

The documentary features carefully composed shots that resemble masterful paintings. Each frame is crafted with precision, leaving a lasting impression on viewers. The use of diverse cinematographic techniques—such as zooms, pans, and rotating shots—adds depth and dimensionality to the visuals.

2.3.3. Vivid use of color

One of the standout features of Aerial China is its rich color palette. Thanks to high-definition filming technology, the natural colors of the landscapes are vividly restored and presented. Whether showcasing the golden deserts, lush green plains, vibrant urban settings, or warm-toned villages, the documentary offers a visually rich and dynamic experience.

2.3.4. Dynamic camera movements

To achieve more engaging and powerful imagery, the production team extensively uses moving shots. With drones and other aerial equipment, the camera glides through the air—plunging, soaring, and spinning—creating fluid motion paths that add energy and dynamism to the scenes.

2.3.5. Musical atmosphere and emotional resonance

Music plays a vital role in enhancing the emotional impact of Aerial China. Whether grand, gentle, stirring, or serene, the soundtrack is carefully synchronized with the visuals, enriching the audience's audiovisual experience. The music not only complements the imagery but also amplifies the atmosphere, making each scene more vivid and emotionally touching.

In summary, the audiovisual language of Aerial China is highly artistic and aesthetically compelling. Through stunning visual design and harmonious musical integration, the documentary delivers a powerful sensory experience that resonates deeply with audiences, both domestically and internationally.

2.4. Emotional strategies in aerial China: Evoking emotional resonance in the audience

Using aerial filming technology, Aerial China vividly presents the magnificent landscapes across China. Whether it is the vast grasslands, the winding Yangtze River, towering mountains, or the expansive deserts, the audience is able to deeply feel the wonder and beauty of nature. This praise and presentation of natural scenery stimulate the viewers' love for and pride in their motherland.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.BO24371

Aerial China also emphasizes cultural symbols. Various cultural symbols are skillfully integrated into the imagery and narrative of the documentary. For instance, cultural heritage sites such as the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, and the Temple of Heaven, as well as unique local folk customs and dialects, are all showcased. These cultural symbols not only demonstrate China's multicultural diversity but also evoke viewers' identification with and memories of their hometown culture, thereby enhancing emotional resonance. [6]

Emotional guidance is another key strategy in the documentary's narrative. Through the organic integration of visuals, narration, and music, cognitive understanding and emotional expression coexist harmoniously within the narrative. For example, the narration often uses poetic language to describe the scenery and contexts, triggering the audience's imagination and emotional resonance; meanwhile, music often plays a role in heightening the atmosphere and eliciting emotions at critical moments.

Aerial China also pays close attention to emotional triggers through detailed depictions. The documentary frequently features small yet beautiful scenes, such as curling smoke rising from rural kitchens, bustling city streets, and interpersonal interactions. These details enable viewers to sense the authenticity and beauty of life, evoking profound feelings towards their hometown and country. [7]

At the same time, emotional connections that transcend time and space are an important component of its emotional strategy. Through aerial shots, the documentary portrays the coexistence of China's history and modernity, urban and rural areas, prosperity and tranquility. This crossing of temporal and spatial boundaries allows viewers to experience the vast changes and rich diversity of the motherland. Such emotional connections not only deepen the audience's cognition and understanding of their country but also inspire hopes and aspirations for the future.

In summary, the emotional strategies of Aerial China are multidimensional and multilayered. Through the presentation of magnificent landscapes, emphasis on cultural symbols, emotional guidance in narration, detailed emotional triggers, and emotional connections across time and space, the documentary successfully evokes deep feelings for the motherland among its viewers, achieving expressive emotional release and communication. [8]

2.5. The global context of aerial China: International collaboration and multilingual dissemination

Firstly, the documentary offers a novel perspective by looking down upon China using new technologies such as drones, orbital satellites, and virtual reality. It presents China's diverse natural ecological environments and rich cultural heritage in a multi-layered and three-dimensional manner. This mode of presentation not only provides Chinese audiences with a fresh visual experience but also offers viewers around the world a unique window into understanding China. [9]

Secondly, Aerial China disseminates the Chinese voice within a global context, showcasing the culture and national symbols of the Chinese people. Through visual symbols, the documentary represents the cultural characteristics of the Chinese nation, including natural landscapes, historical sites, and folk customs, enabling a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of China worldwide. This cultural dissemination helps strengthen China's cultural soft power and enhances its influence on the international stage. [10]

In addition, Aerial China adopts an internationalized narrative style, integrating Chinese stories into a global context. The documentary employs a fragmented and point-specific narrative approach, linking independent narrative elements along a main thread to form a narrative structure with distinctly Chinese characteristics. This narrative mode aligns with international viewing habits while

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.BO24371

highlighting the unique charm of Chinese culture, thereby granting Aerial China broad dissemination and influence on a global scale.

Finally, against the backdrop of globalization, the universal values conveyed by Aerial China, such as environmental protection and humanitarian care, resonate with international audiences. By showcasing China's natural ecology and cultural landscapes, the documentary calls for attention to global issues such as environmental conservation and cultural heritage preservation, embodying the concept of a shared human destiny.

In summary, the global context of Aerial China is reflected in its unique perspective, cultural dissemination, internationalized narrative, and universal values, providing audiences worldwide with a fresh image and cultural experience of China.

3. Challenges and coping strategies for domestic documentaries in cross-cultural communication

3.1. Challenges faced by domestic documentaries in cross-cultural communication

Globalization has intensified and deepened cultural exchanges among countries, providing Chinese documentaries with a broader international market and a more diversified audience. At the same time, globalization also brings greater competitive pressure and numerous practical challenges to Chinese documentaries.[11]

3.1.1. Cultural differences

Different countries and regions possess distinct cultural backgrounds and value systems, which may cause audiences to feel unfamiliar with or misunderstand the themes, perspectives, and narrative styles of Chinese documentaries. Cultural differences not only affect audience acceptance but can also lead to misunderstandings and biases.

3.1.2. Language barriers

International dissemination of documentaries must overcome language barriers. Although Chinese documentaries may be equipped with international language translations, differences in cultural connotations and modes of expression can still result in distortion or misunderstanding of the conveyed information.

3.1.3. Limited distribution

Channels The distribution channels for Chinese documentaries in international markets are relatively limited, mainly relying on platforms such as international film festivals and television festivals. The limited influence of these platforms restricts the global reach of Chinese documentaries.

3.1.4. Content homogeneity

Chinese documentaries exhibit a certain degree of homogeneity in themes and production styles, which may cause international audiences to develop a fixed impression of Chinese documentaries, thereby hindering sustained interest and attention.[12]

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.BO24371

3.1.5. Lack of international

Cooperation and ExchangeThe Chinese documentary industry has relatively few cross-border collaborations and exchanges, limiting its recognition and influence in international markets. The absence of communication and cooperation with international markets easily leads to blind spots and misunderstandings in international dissemination.

To address these challenges, the Chinese documentary industry needs to adopt a series of measures, including strengthening cultural exchanges, expanding distribution channels, innovating content and formats, and enhancing international cooperation, in order to improve the dissemination power and influence of Chinese documentaries in the international market. Additionally, attention must be paid to changes in the global context, with continuous adjustment and optimization of dissemination strategies to adapt to the needs and changes of international markets.

3.2. Coping strategies: Enhancing narrative diversity and cultural sensitivity

The strategies to address the challenges faced by domestic documentaries in cross-cultural communication can be approached from the following aspects:

First, deeply explore cultural connotations. In cross-cultural communication, domestic documentaries should deeply excavate their own cultural connotations, showcasing China's unique cultural charm and values. This approach not only attracts the interest of overseas audiences but also strengthens the cultural confidence and pride of domestic documentaries.

Second, improve production quality. Enhancing production quality is a crucial guarantee for the cross-cultural communication of domestic documentaries. Attention should be given to image, sound effects, editing, and other aspects of production to improve the documentaries' watchability and artistry. At the same time, internationalized modes of expression should be emphasized to better adapt to overseas audiences' viewing habits and aesthetic demands.

Third, emphasize translation work. Translation is a critical link in cross-cultural communication. The quality and accuracy of translations should be ensured so that overseas audiences can fully understand the documentary content. Moreover, attention should be paid to the linguistic feel and cultural background of translations to convey the original flavor of the documentaries as much as possible.

Fourth, expand dissemination channels. Efforts should be made to actively explore overseas markets by cooperating with foreign TV stations, film festivals, distributors, etc., to broaden the dissemination scope of domestic documentaries. At the same time, new channels such as the internet and social media should be utilized to increase the influence and visibility of domestic documentaries.

Fifth, pay attention to international trends. Domestic documentaries should keep abreast of popular trends and hot topics in the international market and innovate accordingly based on domestic realities. This helps domestic documentaries carve out a position in the international market and enhances their competitiveness.

Sixth, strengthen international exchanges and cooperation. Active collaboration and exchange with foreign production institutions and creators should be promoted to jointly advance the prosperity and development of the documentary industry. Through co-productions and joint filming, the quality and internationalization level of domestic documentaries can be improved.

Seventh, cultivate internationalized talents. Emphasis should be placed on training talents with an international perspective and cross-cultural communication skills. These talents can better grasp

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.BO24371

overseas market demands and audience tastes, providing more targeted creative and production plans for domestic documentaries.

In summary, domestic documentaries must comprehensively improve their quality, deeply explore cultural connotations, expand dissemination channels, pay attention to international trends, strengthen international exchanges and cooperation, and cultivate international talents. Only by doing so can they better respond to the challenges and opportunities brought by globalization, enhancing their influence and competitiveness in the international market.

3.3. Future prospects: Enhancing communication effectiveness through new technologies and innovative approaches

With the continuous advancement of technology, new technologies are increasingly applied in documentary production. For example, virtual reality (VR) technology allows audiences to experience documentary scenes and atmospheres immersively; drone filming technology provides wider and more unique perspectives; artificial intelligence (AI) technology enables intelligent editing and personalized recommendations for documentaries. The application of these new technologies can improve the viewing experience and artistic quality of domestic documentaries, enhancing audience immersion and engagement.

In traditional documentary dissemination, audiences are typically passive recipients. However, with the rise of new media, audience interaction and participation demands have grown. By incorporating interactive elements such as online voting, viewer comments, and social media interactions, audiences can engage more deeply in the dissemination process, thereby improving the effectiveness of the documentary's communication.

Moreover, in the digital era, transmedia storytelling has become an important communication strategy. By combining documentaries with other media forms such as novels, games, and animations, the dissemination channels and audience reach can be expanded. This cross-media narrative approach also enriches the documentary’s expressive forms, offering more imaginative possibilities and enjoyment[13].

Data-driven decision-making is another effective method for enhancing the dissemination impact of domestic documentaries. Data serves as a critical foundation for formulating scientific communication strategies. By collecting and analyzing audience data to understand preferences, behaviors, and feedback, documentaries can be tailored with more targeted creativity and production plans. Data can also guide marketing and promotional strategies, further boosting dissemination effectiveness.

Finally, in the context of globalization, cooperation and sharing have become key dissemination concepts. Through collaboration and exchanges with production institutions and creators from other countries or regions, more internationally influential documentary works can be jointly created. Such cooperation also promotes the sharing of knowledge and resources, elevating the overall production quality and innovation capacity of the industry.

4. Conclusion

Documentaries, as an important cultural medium, possess unique communicative value and influence. Aerial China, a highly acclaimed recent documentary, not only showcases China’s magnificent landscapes and cultural sites but has also achieved significant success in cross-cultural communication and national image construction.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.BO24371

By employing unique aerial perspectives and exquisite visual language, Aerial China presents China's natural beauty and modernization achievements to both domestic and international audiences. This visual presentation allows viewers to appreciate China's natural and cultural charm, as well as experience the nation's developmental vitality and future potential. In a globalized context, such positive national image construction plays a crucial role in enhancing China's international status and influence.

Regarding the future development of Chinese documentaries, the success of Aerial China offers valuable lessons and recommendations. Firstly, emphasizing internationalized expressions and audience needs is key to enhancing international competitiveness. Secondly, improving production technology and artistic quality forms the foundation for increasing a documentary's appeal and impact. Additionally, expanding international cooperation and exchange platforms to collaborate with foreign production institutions and creators is an important direction.

In the globalized context, the cross-cultural dissemination of domestic documentaries is vital for promoting Chinese culture abroad and enhancing the national image. Going forward, Chinese documentaries should continue to strengthen international awareness, elevate production quality and innovation, enhance cross-cultural communication capabilities, and actively engage in cooperation and exchanges to meet the challenges and opportunities brought by globalization. Documentary makers should also stay attuned to changes in international market demands and audience preferences, adopting flexible strategies to respond to market challenges. Maintaining China's documentary influence in the global communication landscape will contribute greatly to the dissemination and development of Chinese culture.

References

[1] Wang, J. , & Zhang, X. (2022). Construction of China's national image and international communication strategies in the new era: A case study of the documentary China's Fate: The Communicator. International Communication, (05), 81–88.
[2] Ding, M. , & Hu, Q. (2021). Cross-cultural communication strategies and national image construction in the documentary Aerial China. International Communication, (05), 82–88.
[3] Sun, Y. (2008). Introduction to cross-cultural communication [Book]. Peking University Press.
[4] Sun, L. (2025). Cultural functions and transcultural communication of national narratives in China's mainstream documentaries in the new era. Contemporary Television, (02), 78–82. https: //doi. org/10. 16531/j. cnki. 1000-8977. 2025. 02. 011
[5] Liang, Q. , & Lu, J. (2023). Rhetorical aesthetics and empathy communication in the documentary Aerial China 4: Hubei. Journal of News Forum, (05).
[6] Tian, W. , & Lang, Y. (2024). From cultural misunderstanding to cultural empathy: A study on the cross-cultural communication of Chinese natural ecology documentaries. Contemporary Communication, (06), 105–109.
[7] Hou, X. , & Wang, Q. (2025). Exploring paths for co-produced documentaries to tell China's story under the lens of empathy communication: A case study of Walking Through World Heritage. Sichuan Drama, (02), 114–118.
[8] Su, C. (2024). Construction of China's image and cross-cultural communication from the "other" perspective: A case study of Ryo Takeuchi's documentaries. Voice and Screen World, (23), 66–69.
[9] Yan, J. , & Zeng, D. (2023). Artificial intelligence in cross-cultural communication: Application scenarios, ethical risks, and governance pathways. Science and Technology Think Tank, (08).
[10] Gao, S. (2024). Cross-cultural communication strategies of the bilingual Chinese-English documentary Myriad China. Media, (13), 54–56.
[11] Liu, N. (2001). Challenges to diplomacy posed by media globalization. International Forum, (03).
[12] Liu, B. , & Zhong, H. (2016). Challenges and strategies in the cross-cultural communication of character-scenario documentaries: A case study of the program Visitors to China. China Television, (10), 76–80.
[13] Wang, H. , & Shao, Z. (2022). Cross-cultural narration in Michael Wood's China-themed documentaries. Television Research, (06), 92–94.